

# Action Plan On Bullying

Report of the Anti-Bullying Working Group to the  
Minister for Education and Skills

January 2013



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**“We will encourage schools to develop anti-bullying policies and in particular, strategies to combat homophobic bullying to support students”**

Programme for Government  
Commitment

## Welcome from Minister

Minister Fitzgerald and I convened an Anti-bullying Forum on the 17<sup>th</sup> May, 2012 to explore ways to tackle the serious problem of bullying in schools. This was the first time that the Department of Education and Skills, together with the newly established Department of Children and Youth Affairs, had hosted a dedicated forum on this issue.

The keen interest in and level of attendance at the Forum highlighted the level of concern about this issue among stakeholders and the wider community. Discussions at the Forum raised many thought provoking issues around all forms of bullying including homophobic bullying, cyber bullying and racist bullying.

As part of the Forum, I decided to issue a call for submissions and establish a working group to further explore what could be done through the school system to address this very complex issue.

I was also very concerned that the Department of Education and Skills guidelines on bullying had not been updated since they were first issued in 1993. I wanted to make sure that this was addressed.

In line with the commitment in the Programme for Government, I asked the working group to put a specific focus on homophobic bullying. Research shows that this is a particularly acute problem for young people who are either lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender or perceived to be so. It's important that we recognise that bullying behaviour sometimes stems from prejudice from racism, homophobia or ignorance about a different culture or religion.

Addressing such issues can be difficult, challenging and emotive, but prejudiced attitudes must be explored and dealt with. I take the view that a culture that encourages respect, values opinions, celebrates differences and promotes positive relationships is better for all. All adults, children and young people should understand the role that they can play in preventing and tackling bullying.

I am pleased that the working group has considered all of these issues. I welcome its findings and I propose to adopt the action plan in the coming months.

My thanks are due to all who contributed to this process through the forum, through making submissions and through the consultative process.

I am pleased that this phase of work has been completed and we can now move on to the next phase of implementation. I see this as a great opportunity to reinvigorate and strengthen our approach to preventing and tackling bullying in schools.

I look forward to working with stakeholders to implement the Action Plan.

I want to stress, on a personal note that I am particularly committed to this project, and I want to help bring about a sea change in public attitudes, at all ages, to this continuing scourge.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Ruairí Quinn'.

**Ruairí Quinn T.D.,**

**Minister for Education and Skills**

## Executive Summary

The Anti-Bullying Working Group was tasked with developing a plan to identify the priorities that need to be addressed to combat bullying in schools. In accordance with the Programme for Government, the group was specifically tasked to “identify priority actions that can encourage schools to develop anti bullying policies and in particular strategies to combat homophobic bullying to support students”.

### Development of this report and action plan

The working group considered 68 submissions and consulted with government departments and agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), academics and researchers, colleagues from the UK and individuals who had experience of bullying. The working group also considered national and international literature on the topic including research on approaches and interventions that have been tried over recent decades. The impact of bullying and the very serious consequences for individuals and families was also considered.

The working group was also conscious of the need to hear what children and young people had to say about bullying and how it impacts on their lives. The Ombudsman for Children's Report, which was produced during the course of the work of the group, was very helpful, as were the various recent surveys and reports which consulted young people.

### Scope of our work

While the working group's terms of reference specifically related to bullying in schools, we recognise that there is potential for bullying wherever children, young people and adults gather. We were also aware of the role of parents and the wider community in creating a climate that does not tolerate or foster bullying and which helps children and young people to build resilience. Therefore, we have highlighted the role of parents and the wider community in our report and have made a number of recommendations for consideration which go further than the school environment.

### Summary of this report

- **What is Bullying?** – in this section the working group sets out some of the definitions and research around what constitutes bullying and the different types and forms of bullying behaviour. Based on existing research, we also highlight some key at-risk groups who may be more susceptible to bullying. Our key findings and recommendations relate to the need to update the definition of bullying which was provided in the Bullying Guidelines issued in 1993 and we make suggestions about what should now be included. We also highlight



the need to consider bullying as part of a continuum of behaviour rather than a standalone issue.

- **Impact of Bullying?** – in this section the working group summarises research into the impact of bullying on those that are bullied, those that bully and those that witness bullying. Our key findings and recommendations highlight that bullying behaviour can have a serious impact and potentially tragic consequences for children and young people, families, school communities and wider society.

We also highlight:

- the need for schools to provide educational experiences that seek to minimise all forms of bullying and, thereby, negate the potential impact of bullying behavior;
  - the need for children and young people to be confident that their concerns will be addressed;
  - the need to provide specific prevention initiatives for identity-based bullying;
  - the need for intervention strategies and supports for children and young people affected by bullying and
  - that preventing and tackling homophobic and transphobic bullying in particular can lead to a significant improvement in the school climate for all.
- **What do Children and Young People say about bullying?** – this section summarises the findings from the Ombudsman for Children Report on Consultations with children and young people and also the outcome of a consultation with LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) young people.
  - **What are schools already required to do?** – this section summarises existing legislative and other requirements for schools which are relevant to preventing and tackling bullying. Our key findings and recommendations relate to the overall policy framework and curriculum relevant to preventing and tackling bullying in schools.
  - **Do we need more legislation?** – this section summarises the working group's consideration of existing legislative provisions, consideration of legislation in other jurisdictions and highlights existing relevant legislative initiatives that are already underway. Our key findings and recommendations relate to supporting the implementation of existing legislative requirements and we suggest that some further

research is done on investigative procedures in other jurisdictions to inform thinking here in Ireland;

- **Responses to bullying in schools** - this section summarises some international research on school based initiatives to prevent and tackle bullying and the working group identifies a number of key principles that it recommends should underpin a school – based approach:
  - A positive school culture and climate;
  - School-wide approach;
  - Effective Leadership;
  - A shared understanding of what bullying is and its impact;
  - Anti-bullying policies;
  - Consistent recording of reported bullying behaviour;
  - Education and Training;
  - Prevention strategies including awareness raising;
  - Established evidence-based intervention strategies.

The working group also highlights a number of immediate actions schools can take to prevent and tackle bullying.

- **This is not a problem schools can solve alone** – in this section the working group highlights the fact that bullying is a complex social issue and can occur in many different settings including in the home, in wider family and social groups and during sporting and youth club activities. The working group highlights in particular:
  - the role of parents and other adults in particular and we have identified some key actions and attitudes that adults and parents need to have to help prevent and tackle bullying;
  - the need for children to have positive early childhood experiences;
  - the valuable impact that out of school activities such as sport, youth clubs and the arts can have in developing children and young people's life skills, self-esteem, confidence and resilience as well as providing opportunities to make new friends;
  - the role of industry in relation to cyber bullying; and
  - the role of the media in relation to the reporting of bullying and suicide incidents involving children and young people.
- **Action Plan on Bullying including recommendations for further consideration** – this section of the report sets out the 12 actions to be progressed and a number of recommendations for further consideration by the relevant Ministers, government departments, agencies and bodies are also suggested.

## 1. Introduction and Background

This Anti-Bullying Report and Action Plan is the culmination of work initiated by Ruairí Quinn T.D., Minister for Education and Skills and is supported by a commitment in the Programme for Government “to encourage schools to develop anti-bullying policies and, in particular strategies to combat homophobic bullying, to support students.”

### 1.1. Anti-Bullying Forum

In May 2012, the Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn T.D. and the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Frances Fitzgerald T.D. jointly hosted a forum to explore ways to tackle the problem of bullying in schools.<sup>1</sup>

The Anti-Bullying Forum took place on the 17th of May 2012 and brought together a range of experts including academics, policy makers and practitioners and representatives of the schools sector including parents and students to consider what changes to existing school structures and systems, as well as, practices and policies in schools may be needed in order to effectively tackle bullying. Minister Quinn also issued a call for submissions from interested parties and requested that these be submitted by 29th June 2012.<sup>2</sup>

### 1.2. Anti-Bullying Working Group

Alongside the Forum, Minister Quinn established a working group on tackling bullying in schools, including homophobic bullying, cyber bullying and racist bullying. The outcomes and recommendations from the Forum, along with the submissions received, fed into the deliberations of the working group.

The Terms of Reference for the working group were to develop a plan that identifies:

- The priorities that need to be addressed to combat all bullying in schools including actions to be taken by the Department of Education and Skills, other government departments and agencies and school communities;
- In accordance with the Programme for Government commitment, the group will specifically “identify priority actions that can encourage schools to develop anti-bullying policies and in particular, strategies to combat homophobic bullying to support students”; and

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<sup>1</sup>The presentations and documentation from the Forum are available on the Department of Education and Skills website at [http://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Conferences/cp\\_anti\\_bullying/](http://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Conferences/cp_anti_bullying/)

<sup>2</sup>[http://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Conferences/cp\\_anti\\_bullying/Consultation-on-takling-bullying-in-schools-Invitation-from-Minister-Quinn-.pdf](http://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Conferences/cp_anti_bullying/Consultation-on-takling-bullying-in-schools-Invitation-from-Minister-Quinn-.pdf)

- How these priorities can be addressed and progress monitored.
- In undertaking this work the group will, in particular, have regard to the current financial constraints within which the Department of Education and Skills (DES) is operating and will continue to operate in the coming years.

Membership of the working group is listed in Appendix 1.

### **1.3. Development of this action plan**

The working group received 68 submissions through the call for submissions which Minister Quinn issued at the Anti-Bullying Forum in May 2012. The working group would like to express their appreciation to all those who made submissions, particularly those who shared their personal experience of bullying and its impact on themselves and their children.

A list of organisations and individuals who made submissions is included in this report at Appendix 2. It is intended that these submissions will be made available on the Department of Education and Skills (DES) website ([www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)), when this report is published.

The main themes and issues arising in the submissions can generally be grouped into the following categories:

- National context for tackling bullying in schools
- Links to other social issues including mental health
- Definition of bullying
- Complexity of roles in bullying situations
- Specific types of bullying and respect for diversity
- Cyber bullying
- Awareness raising at national level and at school level
- Curriculum resources, teaching and learning
- Training and education
- Policy at school level
- Supervision in schools
- Pastoral support, coping skills and developing resilience
- Student voice and participation
- Complaints procedures
- Evaluation and monitoring
- Balance of responsibility between school and wider community
- Resources

These and many other issues were considered by the working group in drafting this report and action plan.

Members of the working group met on 15 occasions and met directly with a range of organisations and individuals and the working group would like to express their appreciation for the support and positive engagement that we received. Details of those who made presentations to the working group are provided in Appendix 3.

The working group would like to acknowledge that there is already excellent work being done to prevent and tackle bullying in a myriad of settings including pre-school settings, schools, youth and sports clubs and a range of State- and NGO-run services. The working group acknowledges that the majority of schools have anti-bullying policies and other related policies in place and that many schools regularly review these policies to keep them up-to-date. The actions being recommended by the working group aim to build on, and add value to, the work that is already being done.

In carrying out this important task, the working group was conscious of the recent tragedies involving young people where bullying, and in particular cyber bullying, may have played a part. The working group wish to express their deepest sympathies to the families, friends and communities affected.



What is bullying?

**“Bullying is not about just any kind of injury, nor just any negative impact. It involves a particular kind of harm. It is aimed at engendering a kind of helplessness, an inability to act, to do anything....”**

## 2. What is bullying?

Ken Rigby, a well known researcher in the field of bullying has noted that, “there has, without doubt, been a large increase in **awareness** of bullying. Some years ago many more people thought of bullying as exclusively physical in nature. Now it is widely recognised that most bullying is verbal, and a good deal of bullying is indirect, as in deliberately excluding people. People see bullying now where they did not see it earlier”.<sup>3</sup>

There are many definitions of bullying which generally refer to the types of behaviour that constitute bullying behaviour. These definitions have been refined over the years as the understanding of what constitutes bullying behaviour has increased and new forms and types of bullying have been recognised.

The following definition has been developed, and refined since its earliest formulation, by Professor Olweus, a professor of psychology at Bergen University, Norway, who is considered to be an authority in this area:

“Bullying is (1) intentional negative behaviour that (2) typically occurs with some repetitiveness and is (3) directed against a person who has difficulty defending himself or herself”<sup>4</sup>.

More recently, Sercombe and Donnelly have suggested a reworking of the Olweus definition which describes bullying as a relationship rather than a behaviour:

“Bullying is a relationship of violence involving practices of domination that strip another person of the capacity for agency, using interventions carrying the sustained threat of harm.”<sup>5</sup>

They describe this loss of agency as:

“Bullying is not about just any kind of injury, nor just any negative impact. It involves a particular kind of harm. It is aimed at engendering a kind of helplessness, an inability to act, to do anything....Bullying involves the attempt to deny another any settled place, even a subordinate

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<sup>3</sup>Rigby, K., University of South Australia, “How successful are anti-bullying programs for schools?”, Paper presented at the The Role of Schools in Crime Prevention Conference convened by the Australian Institute of Criminology in conjunction with the Department of Education, Employment and Training, Victoria, and Crime Prevention Victoria and held in Melbourne, 30 September – 1 October 2002.

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<sup>4</sup>Olweus, D. (2011) “Bullying at School and later criminality: findings from three Swedish community samples of males”. *Criminal Behaviour and Mental Health*, Vol. 21, (2).

<sup>5</sup>Howard Sercombe and Brian Donnelly, “Bullying and agency: definition, intervention and ethics”, page 4, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 2012, 1-12, iFirst article.



one. It goes beyond subjection. In bullying, the goal is abjection.”<sup>6</sup>

In terms of impact, bullying behaviour has also been described by the Scottish Anti-Bullying Steering Group “as behaviour which leaves people feeling helpless, frightened, anxious, depressed or humiliated.”<sup>7</sup>

The DES 1993 Guidelines *Countering Bullying Behaviour in Primary and Post-Primary Schools* define bullying as follows:

*Bullying is repeated aggression, verbal, psychological or physical conducted by an individual or group against others. Isolated incidents of aggressive behaviour, which should not be condoned, can scarcely be described as bullying. However, when the behaviour is systematic and ongoing it is bullying. (p. 2).*

The DES 1993 Guidelines list types of behaviour by students that are considered bullying, including: physical aggression, intimidation, abusive telephone calls, isolation, name-calling and bullying of school personnel. The Guidelines also list ways in which teachers can bully

students, such as the use of demeaning language, humiliation of weak students or intimidating behaviour towards students.

Many of the submissions received by the working group referred to the need to update the definition of bullying in the guidelines.

## **2.1. Prevalence of bullying**

Data from the Growing Up in Ireland study (2009) shows that 40% of nine-year-olds reported being victims of bullying in the previous year, and boys and girls experienced similar rates of victimisation<sup>8</sup>. In 2010, 24.3% of children aged 10-17 reported that they were bullied at school at least once in the past couple of months<sup>9</sup>.

In an international comparison across 39 countries and regions, the average percentage of children who reported being bullied at school at least once in the past couple of months was 29.2%. This ranged from 11.1% in Italy to 54.0% in Lithuania. The corresponding percentage in Ireland was 27.3%<sup>10</sup>.

There is great variation in the prevalence rates reported in studies

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<sup>6</sup>Howard Sercombe and Brian Donnelly, “Bullying and agency: definition, intervention and ethics”, page 7, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 2012, 1-12, iFirst article.

<sup>7</sup>The Scottish Government (2010) *A national approach to anti-bullying for Scotland’s Children and Young People*. Edinburgh: The Scottish Government. p. 4.

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<sup>8</sup>Williams *et al* (2009) *Growing Up in Ireland: National Longitudinal Study of Children – The Lives of 9-Year-Olds*. Dublin: The Stationery Office. p. 107

<sup>9</sup> 2010 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) Ireland Report

<sup>10</sup>Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2012) *State of the Nation’s Children: Ireland 2012*. Dublin: Government Publications. Note: International comparisons are based on data from children aged 11, 13 and 15 only.

of bullying. This variability may be due to a number of factors including different methodologies used to survey bullying. The most common method is self-reporting: asking pupils in questionnaires or interviews about their bullying experiences. Other ways include asking teachers or pupils to nominate which children are victims or bullies; observing children; and recording bullying incidents.

Different methods produce different bullying estimates: peer and teacher nominations tend not to correspond well with self-reported information<sup>11</sup> and observations produce higher rates than surveys.<sup>12</sup>

Measuring prevalence of bullying in schools tends to take place either as part of nationwide surveys or as pre- and post-measurement in schools as part of intervention programmes.

The responses to surveys are dependant on the design of the questionnaire, the definition of bullying which is used (provided to pupils or not at all), the groups to whom they are administered, when they are administered, ages, genders, the “reference period” or time frame used in measuring bullying. In addition, the response and rating categories may vary in both number and specificity.

There are significant difficulties in comparing and interpreting data on school based bullying across communities and nations. Pupils in different countries have different perceptions of what counts as bullying and what distinguishes it from other forms of aggressive behaviour.

It is clear from available data that many children and young people will encounter bullying and unfortunately for a minority it will have a very negative impact on their young lives.

However, it must also be acknowledged that a lot is already being done to prevent and tackle bullying in Irish schools. Evidence from the National Parents Council Primary survey (2012) on bullying found that “A great deal of good practice exists in primary schools”.

At post primary level the Joint Managerial Body submission had this to say; “While this renewed focus on the serious challenge of dealing with the causes and consequences of bullying in schools is welcome, it must be acknowledged at the outset that Ireland's schools are generally happy and safe places and that school leaders, teachers and parents have been vigilant, proactive and responsive to this problem over many years”.

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<sup>11</sup>Österman et al, 1994; Salmivalli et al, 1996

<sup>12</sup>Pepler et al, 2004

## **2.2. Single versus repeated incidents**

A recurring theme in relation to defining bullying is whether a single incident constitutes bullying, or whether only repeated incidents constitute bullying. This arises in relation to cyber bullying in particular where a single action, which is then shared or repeated by others, may be as harmful as repeated incidents. A single incident can have a serious effect on a young person and may also constitute harassment which is legally prohibited in schools under the Equal Status Act.

Some submissions to the Working Group proposed that the definition of bullying should not require that the actions be repeated.

This issue highlights the need to see bullying as part of a continuum of behaviour. This issue arises again later in this section when we discuss issues around harassment and assault.

## **2.3. Relational Bullying including deliberate exclusion**

The Irish Second-level Students' Union (ISSU) has urged that the DES definition of bullying incorporate exclusion as a form of bullying. This has also been recommended in other jurisdictions including the Minnesota Prevention of School Bullying Task Force.

Deliberate exclusion is a type of relational bullying. Relational bullying is a more subtle, insidious form of bullying and is, therefore, more difficult to detect. The most common forms of relational bullying include control, e.g. "Do this or I won't be your friend anymore", (implied or stated explicitly), a group ganging up against one person (girl or boy), non-verbal gesturing, nasty looks, malicious gossip or spreading rumours about a person, exclusion from the friendship group and the 'silent treatment'.<sup>13</sup> It includes any act where relationship/friendship is used as a weapon. The ISSU have also noted that age differences between students can be important to address, as bullying of younger students by older students can have a serious impact.

Research has found that girls and boys engage in similar levels of relational bullying. However, research also indicates that the social and emotional effects of relational bullying are greater for girls who perceive the behaviours as more hurtful than boys. Deliberate exclusion and other types of relational bullying could be a particular issue for exceptionally able children and young people.

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<sup>13</sup>James, D. *et al* (2011) "A Friend In Deed? Can Adolescent Girls Be Taught to Understand Relational Bullying?" *Child Abuse Review* Vol. 20, p. 439–454. (Published online 30 May 2010 in Wiley Online Library).

## 2.4. Sexual Bullying and harassment

The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) has defined sexual bullying as "any bullying behaviour, whether physical or non-physical, that is based on a person's sexuality or gender. It is when sexuality or gender is used as a weapon by boys or girls towards other boys or girls - although it is more commonly directed at girls. It can be carried out to a person's face, behind their back or through the use of technology".<sup>14</sup> There is an overlap between sexual bullying and homophobic bullying as the latter is often sexualised.

The role of technology in sexual bullying has been explored in an NSPCC survey report published in 2012. The report found that the threat comes mostly from peers and that "teenagers' awareness of practices to reduce online risk from strangers indicates the success of e-safety campaigns. The focus of these campaigns now needs to shift towards reducing the risk from their peers." It also found that girls are the most adversely affected, that it reveals wider sexual pressures and that technology amplifies the problem.

The report concluded that "To address the problem of sexting, teachers, parents and other adults must be willing to discuss sexual matters, sexual bullying and cyber bullying with teenagers – independently and as part of existing anti-bullying initiatives."<sup>15</sup>

In relation to the terminology and definitions of sexual bullying used, however, there is not unanimous agreement.

The Scottish Anti Bullying service, RespectMe, for instance, cautions about the use of the term sexual bullying. It argues that sexually aggressive behaviour should be seen as just that and that using the term 'sexual bullying' may well dilute sexually aggressive behaviour or harassment to the status of 'just another type of bullying'.

It also cautions that use of this terminology could also elevate bullying to the same status as sexual harassment and sexual assault, which is not always the case. It also points out that the solutions to these behaviours can be very different.

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<sup>15</sup>Ringrose, Jessica, Gill, Rosalind, Livingstone, Sonia, Harvey, Laura (2012) *A qualitative study of children, young people and 'sexting': a report prepared for the NSPCC. London: NSPCC.*

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[http://www.nspcc.org.uk/inform/research/questions/sexual\\_bullying\\_wda70106.html](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/inform/research/questions/sexual_bullying_wda70106.html)

The Equal Status Acts prohibit harassment and sexual harassment in Irish schools.<sup>16</sup>

RespectMe points out that “We must ensure that our children and young people understand that sexually aggressive behaviour and bullying are completely unacceptable, and the consequences of taking part in either can be serious, without confusing the two”.

This issue again highlights the need to see bullying as part of a continuum of behaviour.

## 2.5. At risk groups

While bullying can happen to anyone, a number of submissions focused specifically on vulnerable groups including children and young people with disabilities and special educational needs; children from ethnic minority and migrant groups; children and young people from the Traveller community; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender (LGBT) young people and those perceived to be LGBT; and children of minority religious faiths.

When compared to other children, Traveller children, migrant children and children with a disability and/or chronic illness were more likely to report that they were bullied at

school<sup>17</sup>. Research shows that LGBT young people are less likely to report bullying to school staff<sup>18</sup>.

## 2.6. Identity Based Bullying

In the two decades since the DES 1993 Guidelines were published, we have gained a greater understanding of how a significant proportion of bullying in schools is not merely behavioural, but is rooted in lack of respect for diversity and in social inequalities, both of which have their foundation in wider society.

This understanding has led to a large body of international work on 'prejudice-based bullying' or 'identity based bullying'. This term takes into account the significant extent to which students may be more vulnerable to bullying because of prejudices, stereotyping and stigma against people with particular identities.

The Equality Authority<sup>19</sup> and the UK Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) recognize the usefulness of the term 'identity based bullying'. The EHRC (in Tippet *et al*) defines it as:

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<sup>17</sup>Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2012) State of the Nation's Children: Ireland 2012. Dublin: Government Publications.

<sup>18</sup>Mayock, P. *et al* (2009) Supporting LGBT Lives: A Study of the Mental Health and Well-Being of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People. Dublin: Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN) and BeLonG To Youth Service.

<sup>19</sup>Equality Authority. "School Bullying". Presentation to DES Working Group, July 2012.

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<sup>16</sup>The Equality Authority, 2005, 'Schools and the Equal Status Act', [http://www.education.ie/en/publications/education-reports/ge\\_schools\\_and\\_equality.pdf](http://www.education.ie/en/publications/education-reports/ge_schools_and_equality.pdf)



*Any form of bullying related to the characteristics considered unique to a child's identity, such as their race, religion, sexual orientation or physical appearance. These forms of bullying are not only targeted at an individual, but reflect negative attitudes towards a wider sub-community or group to whom that individual identifies with (or is believed to identify with.) Young people in such groups may be more vulnerable to or at risk of experiencing bullying and can benefit from more targeted support<sup>20</sup>.*

The Equality Authority advised the working group that in addressing bullying consideration must be given to identity based bullying. The Equality Authority referenced Tippet *et al*'s conclusion<sup>21</sup> that:

*'Studies repeatedly highlight that real or perceived differences between children are a cause of bullying, which suggests a poor understanding of diversity among children. For all forms of identity based bullying, preventative strategies that raise awareness and understanding of why people*

*differ, accompanied with an environment which promotes diversity and inclusion, are seen as being of prime importance in tackling prejudiced behaviors.'*

The Equality Authority also advised that all grounds of harassment under the Equal Status Acts (gender (including transgender), civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller community) should be listed in anti-bullying policies. The working group agrees with this suggestion.

The UK Equality and Human Rights Commission found that bullying related to disability, learning difficulties and sexual orientation were particularly prevalent in UK schools and that teachers particularly lacked confidence in addressing bullying related to sexual orientation, transgender issues, and sexist bullying<sup>22</sup>. Studies in Ireland reflect such findings<sup>23</sup>.

All students can be vulnerable to identity based bullying, for example any student can be fearful of being targeted by homophobic name

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<sup>20</sup>Tippett, N. *et al* (2010) Prevention and Response to Identity-based Bullying Among Local Authorities in England, Scotland and Wales. Manchester: Equality and Human Rights Commission. p. iii.

<sup>21</sup>Tippett, N. *et al* (2010) Prevention and Response to Identity-based Bullying Among Local Authorities in England, Scotland and Wales. Manchester: Equality and Human Rights Commission. p. iv.

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<sup>22</sup>Tippett, N. *et al* (2010) Prevention and Response to Identity-based Bullying Among Local Authorities in England, Scotland and Wales. Manchester: Equality and Human Rights Commission. p. v.

<sup>23</sup> For example: Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2012) State of the Nation's Children: Ireland 2012. Dublin: Government Publications. Ombudsman for Children (2012) Dealing with bullying in schools. A consultation with children & young people. Dublin: Ombudsman for Children's Office. [www.oco.ie](http://www.oco.ie)

calling. As a consequence, it is the working group's opinion that preventing and effectively tackling homophobic bullying and transphobic bullying, in particular, will lead to significant improvement in the school climate for all students.

## 2.7. Homophobic Bullying

Homophobic and transphobic bullying (targeted at those who are, or who are believed to be, LGBT) has been found to be widespread in schools in Ireland<sup>24</sup>.

Research by the Children's Research Centre (Mayock *et al*) found that 50% of LGBT people who participated in the research study had experienced bullying in schools.<sup>25</sup>

Research from Dublin City University with 725 SPHE teachers found that 4 out of 5 teachers surveyed were aware of homophobic bullying in their schools.<sup>26</sup> Homophobic bullying is one of the key issues which emerged from the Ombudsman for Children's (OCO) consultation with over 300 children

and young people, which was conducted in 2012. Young people in three of the OCO's consultation workshops identified homophobic bullying as one area of particular concern that needs to be addressed.

One of their principal messages is that "schools need to appreciate how difficult it can be for LGBT young people to speak up about homophobic bullying if the issue of homophobia is never discussed or they perceive the culture within their school to be homophobic or tolerant of homophobic attitudes and behaviours".<sup>27</sup>

As part of its contribution to the working group, BeLonG To Youth Services conducted a consultation with 31 LGBT young people from across Ireland (17 girls and 14 boys, with an average age of 18 years). Two-thirds had experienced homophobic or transphobic bullying in schools.

Submissions to the working group repeatedly raised the issue of homophobic bullying and the difficulty that schools are having with effectively responding to it. This issue arises in many jurisdictions.

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<sup>24</sup> Lynch, K. and Lodge, A. (2002) *Equality and Power in Schools*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

<sup>25</sup> Mayock, P. *et al* (2009) *Supporting LGBT Lives: A Study of the Mental Health and Well-Being of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People*. Dublin: Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN) and BeLonG To Youth Service. p. 67. [www.belongto.org](http://www.belongto.org), [www.glen.ie](http://www.glen.ie)

<sup>26</sup> Norman, J. (2005) *A Survey of Teachers on Homophobic Bullying in Second-Level Schools*. Dublin: Dublin City University (as referenced in Norman, J. & M. Galvin (2006) "Straight Talk: An Investigation of Attitudes and Experiences of Homophobic Bullying in Second-Level Schools" Dublin City University: Centre for Educational Evaluation. p. 6.)

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<sup>27</sup> Ombudsman for Children (2012) *Dealing with bullying in schools. A consultation with children & young people*. Dublin: Ombudsman for Children's Office. p.22. [www.oco.ie](http://www.oco.ie)

A recently published UNESCO report on *Education sector responses to homophobic bullying* reports that this is a global problem. The report provides good policies and practices to facilitate the development of concrete actions to address homophobic bullying.<sup>28</sup>

In Ireland, the DES, in partnership with GLEN, has produced a series of guides for Principals, Deputy Principals, Guidance Counsellors, teachers and all school leaders. These guides have been endorsed by the relevant Education Partners.<sup>29</sup>

## 2.8. Racist Bullying

Submissions to the working group also highlighted the extent of other forms of identity based bullying, such as that experienced by those from ethnic minority and migrant groups. The Integration Centre reported that in a qualitative survey of 442 teachers in secondary and further education institutions, 28% of all teachers (46% of secondary school teachers) had witnessed a racist incident which had occurred in their school/college in the past month. The data indicates that 1 in 3 schools had no formal procedure to follow in the case of racist incidents, with 11% of teachers

reporting that they did not know if such a procedure existed.<sup>30</sup>

In another study, 330 children from ethnic minority and migrant groups and local children from seven schools in Dublin North Inner city took part in child-centred research on inter ethnic relations. The report concluded that "racial bullying is clearly identifiable as an issue for many migrant children. Racism occurs both in and out of school. This usually takes the form of ethnic name calling, but can also involve physical assault."<sup>31</sup>

## 2.9. Bullying related to Disabilities or Special Educational Needs

Children and young people with a disability or special educational need can also be more at risk of bullying. In particular, there can be a greater vulnerability for children and young people who do not understand social cues and have difficulty communicating. Some children and young people with complex needs do not understand the concept of friendship and therefore trust everyone implicitly. Some do not know how to make judgments about what is safe information to share.

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<sup>28</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (2012) Booklet 8: Education sector responses to homophobic bullying. France: UNESCO.

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002164/216493e.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> The guides are available at [www.glen.ie](http://www.glen.ie) and also from the DES website [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)

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<sup>30</sup>The Integration Centre submission to DES working group June 2012, p. 2, citing Behaviour & Attitude Survey for Teachers Union Ireland (2009), Racism and Interculturalism, and Resources for Minority Ethnic students.

<sup>31</sup>Curry, P. *et al* (2011) Where to from here? Inter-ethnic Relations among Children in Ireland. Dublin: Liffey Press.



Norwich and Kelly<sup>32</sup> investigated the views of children with moderate learning difficulties. In particular the study reported a high level of bullying<sup>33</sup>, irrespective of placement and gender. In relation to forms of bullying: 68 per cent reported a mixture; 24 per cent mainly verbal; 5 per cent mainly physical, 3 per cent mainly teasing. Almost half of the reported bullying related to the students' learning difficulties. Approximately half of pupils reported bullying by pupils in their own school while pupils in special schools reported significantly more bullying by neighbours and people outside of school, including other mainstream pupils.

As part of a research project commissioned by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (UK), which aimed to provide an insight into identity based bullying of young people in schools and in the wider community, Tippet *et al* surveyed the literature in relation to specific identity based bullying, including "disablist" bullying. It refers to the UK National Autistic Society investigation of bullying through parental questionnaires and a limited set of interviews with children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders. Their findings indicated that two in five children with

autism had been bullied. In respect to children with high functioning autism this figure went up to almost three in five. The researchers reported that boys tend to be more vulnerable to bullying and that children in mainstream settings are more likely to experience bullying<sup>34</sup>.

## 2.10. Cyber Bullying

Professor Mona O'Moore describes cyber bullying as "an extension of traditional bullying with technology providing the perpetrator with another way to abuse their target."<sup>35</sup>

Thus, cyber bullying can often take the form of identity based bullying such as racist or homophobic bullying.

When bullying behaviour is carried out through the use of information and communication technologies such as e-mail, mobile phones, instant messaging (IM), social networking websites, apps, and other online technologies it becomes increasingly difficult to deal with and goes beyond the traditional boundaries of the school environment.

2011 research by Cotter and McGilloway reported that 17% of 12-18 year old Irish students reported

<sup>32</sup>Norwich, B and N. Kelly (2004) "Pupils' views on inclusion: moderate learning difficulties and bullying in mainstream and special schools". *British Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 30, No. 1, February 2004, p. 43-65.

<sup>33</sup>83 per cent of overall sample reported bullying

<sup>34</sup>Tippett, N. *et al* (2010) Prevention and Response to Identity-based Bullying Among Local Authorities in England, Scotland and Wales. Manchester: Equality and Human Rights Commission. p. 29.

<sup>35</sup>O' Moore, M. (2012) "Cyber-Bullying: the situation in Ireland" *Pastoral Care in Education: an international journal of personal, social and emotional development*. London: Routledge.

being the victim of cyber bullying at least once<sup>36</sup>.

The Irish study for EU Kids Online found that 4% of children between the ages of 9 and 16 in Ireland experienced online bullying compared with an EU average of 6%.<sup>37</sup>

Although overall, the vast majority of children have not been bullied on the internet; those who have been bullied online are more likely to have been bullied on a social networking site or by instant messaging than by email, in gaming sites or chatrooms.

Being the target of nasty or hurtful messages is the most common form of online bullying. Among children who say “yes, I have been sent nasty or hurtful messages on the internet”, two thirds (68%) of their parents were unaware or said that their child has not been bullied.

It is teenagers who experience more electronically mediated forms of bullying. 15-16 year olds report the greatest levels of cyber bullying – 9% on the internet and 10% by mobile phone. The lower incident rate of cyber bullying among younger

children gives support to the Growing up in Ireland findings<sup>38</sup> that showed that 5% of nine year olds were cyber bullied compared with 40% who had been bullied by traditional means.

However, Professor Mona O'Moore provides evidence that cyber bullying may be on the increase. She reports that 13.9% of 12–16 year olds reported that they had been cyber bullied in the last couple of months<sup>39</sup>.

In particular, Professor O'Moore reports that “...one in five students were found to be involved either as a cyber-bully, cyber-victim, or both...”.<sup>40</sup>

## 2.11. Other reasons for bullying

It is important to remember that children and young people can be bullied for no apparent reason. Sometimes, it can be as a result of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Physical attributes such as hair colour, weight or even the fact that some one wears glasses can sometimes be used to bully someone.

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<sup>36</sup>Cotter, P. & McGilloway, S. (2011). Living in an “electronic age”: Cyberbullying among Irish adolescents. *Irish Journal of Education*, 39, 44-56.

<sup>37</sup>O'Neill, B., Grehan, S. & Olafson, K. (2011) Risks and safety for children on the Internet: the Ireland report. LSE, London: EU Kids Online.p.34.  
Livingstone, S., Haddon, L., Gorzig, A. & Olafsson, K. (2011) Risks and safety on the Internet. The perspectives of European children. Full findings. LSE, London: EU Kids Online. p. 61-71.

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<sup>38</sup>Williams *et al* (2009) Growing Up in Ireland: National Longitudinal Study of Children – The Lives of 9-Year-Olds. Dublin: The Stationery Office.p. 106 & 107.

<sup>39</sup> O' Moore, M. (2012) “Cyber-Bullying: the situation in Ireland” *Pastoral Care in Education: an international journal of personal, social and emotional development*. London: Routledge.p.5.

<sup>40</sup> O' Moore, M. (2012) “Cyber-Bullying: the situation in Ireland” *Pastoral Care in Education: an international journal of personal, social and emotional development*. London: Routledge.p. 1.

Events that distinguish children or young people as different or special can also be a trigger for bullying. The following story illustrates this latter point.

A young girl, Elaine Doyle, came under the spotlight because she achieved 100 per cent in a physics test. Speaking in 2002, at a National Conference on Bullying and Suicide in Schools, this is what Elaine said:

*Words cannot possibly describe the feelings that I suffered – isolation, rejection, insecurity, depression, the list goes on. I think the isolation hurt the most, had the biggest, most harmful effect. I felt so alone, so afraid like as if I was trapped in a nightmare I just couldn't get out of. I didn't feel safe anywhere, not even at home because no matter where I was there was so much going on in my head I could never escape the torture... My self-esteem and confidence had been destroyed. I became extremely paranoid and pessimistic. I felt I was the only person that this had ever happened to; I didn't see a way out.<sup>41</sup>*

The working group also recognise that children and young people who engage in bullying behaviour do not always intend to bully or recognise the potential negative impact of their words and actions on others.

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<sup>41</sup> Doyle, Elaine (2002) 'Buying Time' in Proceedings of the Second National Conference on Bullying and Suicide in Schools, the Irish Association of Suicidology and the National Suicide Review Group, Castlebar, Mayo. Connaught Telegraph, 2002

## 2.12. Key Findings and Recommendations

- The working group recommends that the definition of bullying in the new national procedures for schools should include a specific reference to the following forms and methods of bullying:
  - *deliberate exclusion, malicious gossip and other forms of relational bullying,*
  - *cyber bullying,*
  - *sexual bullying and*
  - *identity based bullying (specifically including homophobic bullying, transphobic bullying, racist bullying and bullying of those with disabilities or special educational needs).*
- All grounds of harassment under the Equal Status Acts should be listed in anti-bullying policies (gender (including transgender), civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller community).
- Bullying should be considered as part of a continuum of behaviour rather than a standalone issue and in some cases behaviour may escalate beyond what can be described as bullying to serious physical or sexual assault or harassment.
- In that context, as part of their Code of Behaviour, schools need to be prepared to respond appropriately to once off incidents, including the misuse of social media.





## Impact of bullying

**“Loss of self-esteem, anxiety, stress, depression, difficulties with school work, reluctance to attend school, and, in extreme cases, self-harm and suicide”**

### 3. Impact of bullying

Several presentations and submissions to the working group made reference to the serious negative impact of bullying in schools.

Mary Keane, Head of the National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS), has described adolescents who are being bullied as being “wiped out with tiredness because they are constantly in a state of high alert, waiting and watching for the next bullying action.”

The UK Equality and Human Rights Commission reported that the negative outcomes of bullying were “loss of self-esteem, anxiety, stress, depression, difficulties with school work, reluctance to attend school, and, in extreme cases, self-harm and suicide”.<sup>42</sup>

UNESCO has argued that homophobic bullying needs to be addressed because “it is a threat to the universal right to education”<sup>43</sup>.

#### 3.1. Impact on learning

It is clear that bullying can become a major barrier to learning. Professor Mona O'Moore in *Understanding*

*School Bullying* says that “Children who are victimised are unable to draw maximum benefit from teaching and learning because so much of their energy is taken up with trying to keep safe”.<sup>44</sup>

Stress and anxiety caused by bullying can make it more difficult for young people to learn. It can affect concentration levels and decrease ability to focus. In turn, this affects the ability to understand and retain information. For fear of reprisal after class, students who are being bullied can also demonstrate a reluctance to participate in lesson activities or discussions.

The Family Support Agency / Barnardos booklet *Parenting Positively – Helping Teenagers to cope with Bullying*, describes the impact of bullying on teenagers and their learning as:

- They may feel distracted and pre-occupied with the bullying, spending time thinking of ways to avoid it.
- They may feel a lack of interest and motivation due to feelings of depression or anxiety.
- They may arrive late to classes because they are being bullied or may be hiding from the bullying between classes.

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<sup>42</sup>Hawker and Boulton (2000) as cited in Tippet, N. et al (2010) Prevention and Response to Identity-based Bullying Among Local Authorities in England, Scotland and Wales. Manchester: Equality and Human Rights Commission. p. 16.

<sup>43</sup>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (2012) Booklet 8: Education sector responses to homophobic bullying. France: UNESCO. p. 23.  
<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002164/216493e.pdf>

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<sup>44</sup>O'Moore, M. (2010) *Understanding School Bullying: A guide for parents and teachers*. Dublin: Veritas. p. 83.



- They might avoid school, complain of regular illness or miss from classes or activities to avoid the bullying.<sup>45</sup>

### 3.2. Mental Health

Bullying can have a very negative impact on a person's mental health and sense of well-being. Bullying is so personal and focused that it can destroy a person's ego, sense of identity and ability to recover from bullying behaviour. A person may suffer from anxiety, panic attacks, depression and other psychological issues. A person who has been bullied may also be overwhelmed by guilt for having allowed bullying behaviour to impact upon them.

A report on consultation with Irish young people around mental health issues, *What helps and what hurts?*<sup>46</sup>, notes the ways that young people felt that bullying impacts on young people's mental health and included feeling "scared, worthless, insecure, depressed, isolated, inferior, annoyed, angry, that they want to bully others and wondering 'what's the point?'".

Some research indicates that boys who had been bullied "had significantly higher levels of depressive

symptoms and anxiety, and poorer self esteem than those without a history of victimisation".<sup>47</sup>

This research and other research<sup>48</sup> has highlighted that LGBT young people or those perceived to be, can be at higher risk of self harm, suicidal thoughts and behaviours, victimisation, serious physical abuse and problems with schoolwork.

The working group welcomes the forthcoming publication of the *Well-Being in Post-Primary Schools: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention (2013)* which have been developed by an inter-departmental group involving the Department of Education and Skills, the Health Service Executive and the Department of Health.

### 3.3. Self harm and suicidal behaviour

The National Office for Suicide Prevention reports that Ireland has the fourth highest rate of youth suicide in Europe<sup>49</sup> (based on 2009 data) and the National Suicide Research Foundation reports that in 2010 1,198 young people, aged 19 and under,

<sup>45</sup>Parenting Positively Helping Teenagers to Cope with Bullying, Family Support Agency and Barnardos, 2011, Page 11.

<sup>46</sup>What helps and what hurts? Report on the outcomes of consultations with teenagers on Mental Health, Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, 2009.

<sup>47</sup>Bullying victimisation, self harm and associated factors in Irish adolescent boys, Elaine McMahon, UdoReulbach, Helen Keeley, Ivan j. Perry, Ella, Arensman, Social Science and Medicine 71 (2010) 1300-1307

<sup>48</sup>Includes Supporting LGBT Lives and research referred to in McMahon et al page 1306 from [http://www.nsr.ie/publications\\_2010/bullyingvictimisation.pdf](http://www.nsr.ie/publications_2010/bullyingvictimisation.pdf)

<sup>49</sup>National Office for Suicide Prevention (2012) Annual report 2011 Dublin: Health Service Executive.p.53.

were treated in hospital as a result of deliberate self-harm.<sup>50</sup> It should be noted that many incidents of self-harm and suicidal behaviour are not reported.

Self-harm and suicidal behaviour are often closely related and some studies have found that repeated self-harm can be a predictor of suicide.<sup>51</sup>

The National Suicide Prevention Strategy for England<sup>52</sup> includes a section on preventing suicide following self-harm. The risk-factors for self-harm are quite similar to those for suicidal behaviour and include psychological, biological, social and environmental factors and factors related to personal history.

The trigger for self-harm and suicidal behaviour can be an unfortunate event, such as a relationship breakdown, interpersonal problem or financial difficulty. Depression or other psychiatric disorders, affiliations with deviant peer groups, binge drinking, and being victimised by violence or bullying, can also be important associated contributing factors.

Research by McMahon et al<sup>53</sup> identifies other factors associated with self-harm for both genders as drug use and knowing a friend who had engaged in self-harm.

Among girls, poor self esteem, forced sexual activity, self harm of a family member were high level factors. For boys, high level factors were experiencing bullying, problems with schoolwork, impulsivity and anxiety.

In the [My World Survey](#), nearly 10% of young people of school-going age reported significant personal problems, which they felt needed professional help, but this help was not sought. These young people reported high levels of distress and low levels of well-being. Over a fifth of young adults indicated that they had engaged in self-harm and 7% reported a suicide attempt. Suicidal thoughts, rates of self-harm and suicide attempts were found to be higher among young people who did not seek help or talk about their problems.<sup>54</sup> This research also showed that young people who had experienced bullying were also more likely to report symptoms of distress.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Derived from appendix 1 of National Suicide Research Foundation (2011) National Registry of Deliberate Self Harm Ireland Annual Report 2010. Cork: National Suicide Research Foundation. p. 24.

<sup>51</sup>Gairin, L., House, A. & Owens, D.(2003) Attendance at the accident and emergency department in the year before suicide: retrospective study.*British Journal of Psychiatry*, **183**, 28 -33

<sup>52</sup>[www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH\\_4009474](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4009474)

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<sup>53</sup>McMahon, E. et al (2010) "Factors associated with deliberate self-harm among Irish adolescents". *Psychological Medicine*, Vol. 40, p.1811–1819.

<sup>54</sup>Headstrong (2012).My World Survey:National Study of Youth Mental Health in Ireland. UCD School of Psychology, Dublin: The National Centre for Youth Mental Health.p. ix.

<sup>55</sup>Headstrong (2012).My World Survey:National Study of Youth Mental Health in Ireland. UCD School of Psychology, Dublin: The National Centre for Youth Mental Health.p. 41.

However, these issues are complex and the research indicates that there can be a complex interaction between causal factors of self harm and suicidal thoughts and behaviours.

Hodges and Perry<sup>56</sup> report that preexisting mental health problems contributed to becoming a victim of bullying, which again increased later symptoms. The direction of causality between bullying and mental health problems such as depression, low self esteem and suicidal behaviour can thus be both ways.

### **3.4. Impact on individuals who engage in bullying behaviour**

There are consequences also for individuals who engage in bullying behaviour. Children who become involved in such behaviour are also at risk of depression. Indeed, it has been claimed that the greatest risk of suicidal thoughts was detected amongst youngsters who bullied.<sup>57</sup>

Some of the possible long-term consequences associated with bullying others include: an increased risk of developing an anti-social personality; anxiety disorders; a likelihood of drug abuse and lawbreaking behaviour in adulthood;

decreased educational and occupational attainment; and an aggressive parenting style.<sup>58</sup>

### **3.5. Impact of Homophobic Bullying**

Research by Mayock *et al* found that 50% of those surveyed had experienced bullying in schools and found a clear correlation between homophobic and transphobic bullying and serious mental health difficulties among LGBT people to the extent that:

- 27% of LGBT people surveyed had self-harmed at least once in their life.
- Over 50% of LGBT people (under 25) surveyed had seriously thought of ending their lives.
- Just under 20% of LGBT people (under 25) surveyed had attempted suicide.<sup>59</sup>

In December 2011, the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon declared that homophobic bullying was a '**moral outrage, a grave violation of human rights and a public health crisis. It is also a loss for the entire human family when promising lives are cut short**'.<sup>60</sup> The UN Secretary General

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<sup>56</sup>Hodges E.V & Perry D.G (1999) "Personal and interpersonal antecedents and consequences of victimisation by peers". *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* Vol. 76(4) p. 677-685.

<sup>57</sup>Kaltialo-Heino, R., Rimpelo, M., Martunen, M., Rimpela, A., and Rantaneau, P. Bullying, (1999) "Depression and Suicidal Ideation in Finnish Adolescents: School Survey". *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 319 (1999), pp.348-351.

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<sup>58</sup>O'Moore, M. (2010) *Understanding School Bullying: a guide for parents and teachers*. Dublin: Veritas.

<sup>59</sup>Mayock, P.*et al*(2009)*Supporting LGBT Lives: A Study of the Mental Health and Well-Being of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People*.Dublin: Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN) and BeLonG To Youth Service. p. 17, 18, 85 & 94.

<sup>60</sup><http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2011/sgsm14008.doc.htm>

called on governments around the world to take steps to combat homophobic bullying.

### 3.6. Impact of Racist Bullying

The UK Equality and Human Rights Commission states that ethnic minority children may be less likely to report racist bullying, which often takes the form of name-calling or exclusion.

This report<sup>61</sup> pointed out some ways in which racist bullying can have a significant impact on the target:

- Racist name-calling can be particularly hurtful and damaging for a child and those who are being bullied in this way may feel that not only are they being attacked but also their family and community.
- Ethnic minority or Traveller children may feel so unsupported in stopping name-calling that they believe the only possible responses are school avoidance or retaliation; the latter can lead to disciplinary measures by the school.

### 3.7. Impact of bullying on Travellers

The report on the Irish Traveller Movement's Yellow Flag intercultural education programme for schools indicates that many young Travellers hide their identity and that they

experience isolation and rejection in schools<sup>62</sup>. The 2012 State of the Nation's Children report states that 31.6% of Traveller young people aged 10-17 reported they were bullied at school at least once in the past couple of months. This compares to 24.3% of all those in the 10-17 age group reporting bullying.<sup>63</sup>

### 3.8. Impact of bullying related to disabilities or special educational needs

The 2012 State of the Nation's Children report also shows that 28.9% of young people aged 10-17 with a disability and/or chronic illness report having being bullied at school in the past couple of months.<sup>64</sup>

The serious impacts of bullying on children and young people with a disability or special educational needs may include<sup>65</sup>:

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<sup>62</sup>Titley, A. (2010) The Irish Traveller Movement Yellow Flag Programme Research Report. Dublin: Irish Traveller Movement.

[www.itmtrav.ie/publication/reports](http://www.itmtrav.ie/publication/reports)

<sup>63</sup>Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2012) State of the Nation's Children: Ireland 2012. Dublin: Government Publications.

<sup>64</sup>Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2012) State of the Nation's Children: Ireland 2012. Dublin: Government Publications.

<sup>65</sup> See for example, Tippet, N. *et al* (2010) Prevention and Response to Identity-based Bullying Among Local Authorities in England, Scotland and Wales. Manchester: Equality and Human Rights Commission. p. 27 and Staff Commission for Education & Library Boards Northern Ireland *et al* (2010) It's good to listen: experiences of pupils with Special Educational Needs. Belfast: Staff Commission for Education & Library Boards. <http://www.staffcom.org.uk/pdfs/ItsGoodtoListen.pdf>

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<sup>61</sup>Tippet, N. *et al* (2010) Prevention and Response to Identity-based Bullying Among Local Authorities in England, Scotland and Wales. Manchester: Equality and Human Rights Commission. p. 29.

- Children and young people with disabilities that affect their appearance are more likely to experience name-calling, with attendant impacts on their self-esteem and mental health.
- This group of students may also be rated as less popular than their peers and have fewer friends.
- Some of these children and young people may also be more likely to bully others.
- Some of these students may be at increased risk of avoiding school.
- Students with disabilities or special educational needs who have been bullied have reported feeling unhappy at school and may spend less time with their peers at breaks.

The UK National Autistic Society investigated bullying through parental questionnaires in addition to a limited set of interviews with children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders<sup>66</sup>. The reported effects of bullying included damage to self esteem, and negative impact on social interaction including mental health. It also affected children's education with 56% of parents reporting that it caused their child to miss school or change school.

### 3.9. Impact of relational bullying

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<sup>66</sup>Tippett, N. *et al* (2010) Prevention and Response to Identity-based Bullying Among Local Authorities in England, Scotland and Wales. Manchester: Equality and Human Rights Commission. p. 29.

The effects of relational bullying, as identified through research, include: difficulty in trusting others and in forming new friendships; social avoidance, increased sense of loneliness; low self-esteem; self-abusive behaviours; anxiety, depression; suicidal ideation.

Relationally aggressive acts have also been found to be the precursors of many acts of violence among young women.<sup>67</sup>

### 3.10. Impact of Cyber Bullying

The group has considered, in particular, how cyber bullying differs from other methods of bullying and has identified a number of key differences:

- Cyber bullying can happen any time and any place and for many young people, home is no longer a safe haven from bullying;
- Online communication between young people is often hidden from adults. Young people are increasingly communicating in ways that are unknown to adults and free from supervision;

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<sup>67</sup>James, D., Flynn, A., Lawlor, M., Courtney, P., Murphy, N., Henry, B. (2010) "A Friend in Deed? Can Adolescent Girls Be Taught To understand Relational Bullying?" *Child Abuse Review*, Vol. 20, Issue 6, Nov/Dec 2011, p. 439-454.



- The anonymity that the Internet affords has particular consequences. In most cases, cyber bullies know their targets, but their targets don't always know the identity of their cyber bullies. This can lead to children and young people being suspicious of, and alienated from, all their peers;
- Young people posting messages on the Internet do not feel as responsible for their actions as they might otherwise. They are not immediately confronted with the consequences of their actions and they don't fear being punished for them. The nature of the medium means digital content can be shared and seen by a very wide audience almost instantly and is almost impossible to delete permanently. Young people may not be aware that the nature of cyber bullying provides for a permanent record of the bullying offense which could impact on them in the future;
- Young people are often fearful of reporting incidents, as they fear that adults will take away their mobile phone, computer and/or Internet access.

Within the school environment internet access is often supervised and access to social networking and computer based instant messaging services can be filtered under the content filtering arrangements inherent in the Schools Broadband Network. While cyber bullying often takes place at home

and at night, the consequences are often felt in school. In addition, cyber bullying can be an extension of traditional bullying in school and consequently schools have a role, working with the wider school community, and in particular parents, in tackling this issue.

### **3.11. Impact of sexual bullying and harassment**

Sexual bullying and harassment at school can affect studying and learning in the same way as other forms of bullying. It may also have serious effects on self esteem, body image and the perception of relationships. It may also coerce young people into engaging in sexual relationships earlier than they might otherwise do so.

The Irish report for the EU Kids Online Survey found that 11% of children aged 11 to 16 years in Ireland had seen or received sexual messages on the internet in the past 12 months. The age trend is marked - 3% of 11 to 12 year olds, 7% of 13-14 year old, and 21% of 15-16 year olds have seen such messages. The latter figure is similar to the European average for this age group which is 22%.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>*Eu Kids Online survey: Ireland Report 2011*

### 3.12. Impact on bystanders or witnesses

Bystanders or witnesses play important roles in the dynamic of bullying. The working group recognises that children and young people who witness bullying may suffer in similar ways to those who are bullied. For example, children and young people who witness identity based bullying and share that identity can experience anxiety and feel that their identity is not welcome.

According to one study, published in the *Canadian Journal of School Psychology*<sup>69</sup>, 85% of bullying takes place with bystanders present. The same study found that nearly 60% of the time bullying will stop in less than 10 seconds when peers intervene. However, another study showed that bystanders made attempts to intervene less than 20% of the time.<sup>70</sup>

Children and young people understandably have all kinds of fears about intervening to stop someone bullying. Many witnesses' to bullying may feel embarrassed or powerless, overcome by feelings of guilt or distress for not helping the person

being bullied. Many students fear being labeled a "tattler".

Children and young people may fear that if they intervene the person bullying will then turn on them. Students who witness or participate in repeated bullying may become desensitised and lose the ability to recognise the detriments to aggressive behaviour.

A study conducted by Robert Thornberg in 2007<sup>71</sup> came up with seven reasons why children do not help when another classmate is in distress. These can be summarised as:

- seeing an incident as insignificant or normal,
- feeling that it has nothing to do with them because they weren't involved in the incident or aren't friends with the victim,
- not wanting to add to the embarrassment of the victim or to incur personal embarrassment,
- not getting involved because no one else is doing anything,
- wanting to get on with their own work,
- compliance with existing routines or behaviours, and
- because they feel it is someone else's responsibility.

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<sup>69</sup>Pepler, D. and W. Craig (1997) "Observations of bullying and victimization in the school yard." *Canadian Journal of School Psychology*, Vol. 13(2) p. 41 - 60.

<sup>70</sup>Pepler, D. J., Craig, W.M. (1995). *A Peek behind the fence: Naturalistic observations of aggressive children with remote audiovisual recording*. *Developmental Psychology*, 31, 545-553.

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<sup>71</sup>Thornberg, R (2007). "A classmate in distress: schoolchildren as bystanders and their reasons for how they act." *Social Psychology of Education* **10**: 5-28.

In a further study<sup>72</sup>, Thornberg concluded that there are seven stages of moral deliberation as a bystander in bystander situations:

- **Noticing** that something is wrong. Children pay selective attention to their environment, and sometimes they don't tune in on a distressed peer if they're in a hurry or their view is obstructed.
- **Interpreting** a need for help - sometimes children think others are just playing rather than actually in distress or they assume incorrectly that although they dislike the behaviour others accept it because they aren't publicly intervening.
- **Feeling empathy**, i.e., having tuned in on a situation and concluded that help is needed, children might feel sorry for an injured peer, or angry about unwarranted aggression.
- **Processing the school's values** – contextual factors in schools such as gender stereotypes, the culture of caring and the definition of a good student influence children's behaviour in bystander situations.
- **Scanning for social status** and relations, i.e., students were less likely to intervene if there are students they consider to be higher status or friends of the target present or involved in the aggression. Conversely, lower-

status children were more likely to intervene if only a few other low-status children were around.

- **Condensing motives** for action, when children are about to intervene they consider multiple factors such as possible benefits and costs, fear of embarrassment, and thinking it was someone else's responsibility. This decision is more often rooted in interpersonal and institutional processes than in the individual.

A 2003 study showed that bystanders can be influenced by teachers to intervene when they witness bullying behaviour<sup>73</sup> and this is more likely to occur when peer group pressure is mobilised to bring this about.<sup>74</sup>

In relation to cyber bullying, the distinction between bystanders and active participants can be less distinct. Responsibility often goes beyond the person who creates and posts harmful content online. Sharing, or commenting on content on social networking websites or joining, subscribing, or following online sources of content intended to

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<sup>72</sup>Thornberg, Robert (2010). "A student in distress: Moral frames and bystander behavior in school". *Elementary School Journal* **110** (4): 585-608.

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<sup>73</sup>Menesini, E., Codecasa, E., Benelli, B., and Cowie, H. (2003). "Enhancing children's responsibility to take action against bullying: evaluation of a befriending intervention in Italian middle schools". *Aggressive Behaviour*, vol. 29, issue 1, p. 1-14

<sup>74</sup>Rigby, K., & Johnson, B. (2006). *Expressed Readiness of Australian school children to act as bystanders in support of children who are being bullied*. *Educational Psychology*, 26, 425-441.



humiliate or harm individuals can also be considered bullying behaviour.

Many intervention approaches seek to change behaviour and encourage children and young people to report bullying and change anti-bullying attitudes to anti-bullying behaviour.

### 3.13. Key findings and recommendations

- Bullying behaviour can have a serious impact and potentially tragic consequences for children and young people, families, school communities and wider society.
- Schools should provide educational experiences that seek to minimise all forms of bullying and, thereby, negate the potential impact of bullying behaviour.
- Specific prevention initiatives are required to address identity based bullying.
- Children and young people need to have confidence that their concerns will be addressed.
- Interventions and supports need to be provided for children and young people directly involved and impacted by bullying.
- The working group recommends that schools work to prevent and effectively tackle homophobic and transphobic bullying in particular, which will lead to significant improvement in the school climate for all students.





What do children and young people say about bullying?

**“Good ways to let children know the school plan on bullying are the teachers discussing with the class and sending notes home to let parents know to discuss bullying openly with their children.”**

#### 4. What do children and young people say about bullying?

Many submissions received by the working group referred to the need to actively involve children, young people, student councils and the ISSU in the development of school anti-bullying policies. In particular, Dr. James O'Higgins Norman (DCU) outlined the importance of the student voice in his submission. He suggested that in order to gain the support and cooperation of students in addressing bullying that students should be involved in developing ways to challenge discriminatory behaviour by their peers.

The working group's deliberations were informed by two recent consultations with children and young people.

The Ombudsman for Children's Office<sup>75</sup> recently conducted a consultation with over 300 children and young people aged between 10 and 17 years of age about how to deal effectively with bullying in schools. The consultation report mainly focuses on the views of children on bullying prevention and intervention strategies. The report highlights the difficulties that children experience in speaking up about bullying.

These include:

- fear of reprisals by bullies;
- concerns about being perceived as a "tell-tale" for reporting bullying;
- concerns about "getting into trouble" with the principal or teacher for reporting bullying;
- not having evidence to back up a bullying allegation;
- not knowing how the matter will be dealt with by the school; and
- not feeling fully confident of being believed.

The views on prevention outlined in the report focus on school planning, awareness raising and education. The following extracts provide the key points from the report:

- Children and young people must be given meaningful opportunities to participate in the development of their schools' anti-bullying policies. One child suggests "good ways to let children know the school plan on bullying are the teachers discussing with the class and sending notes home to let parents know to discuss bullying openly with their children."

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<sup>75</sup>Ombudsman for Children (2012) Dealing with bullying in schools. A consultation with children & young people. Dublin: Ombudsman for Children's Office.[www.oco.ie](http://www.oco.ie)

- The school's anti-bullying policy should provide an outline of what steps will be taken and by whom when bullying occurs, including information about how students will be supported to speak up if they are being bullied, witness bullying or are bullying, and who they can speak to.
- Initiatives and programmes focused on developing students' awareness and understanding of bullying, including its causes and effects, must deal explicitly with the issue of homophobic bullying if the practices of stereotyping and stigmatisation of LGBT young people by their peer group are to be addressed.
- Schools can increase awareness by displaying posters around the school, dedicating a special school assembly at the start of the school year to outline the school's anti-bullying policy and providing children with the option of giving anonymous feedback via suggestion boxes in every classroom.
- Children must be able to feel that they can talk to "an approachable person" and that this would be someone who "will take the issue seriously"<sup>76</sup>.
- In light of children and young peoples' reluctance to speak up about bullying, participants were of the view that parents, teachers and other staff in the school need to be proactive.
- The school needs to be aware that students may not always have evidence to support their allegations of bullying.
- Threats of suspension and expulsion do not prevent bullying from happening; they do not deal with the underlying reasons why the bullying has occurred.

#### 4.1. Consultation with LGBT young people

At the consultation with 31 LGBT young people which BelonG To Youth Services held in August 2012, 23 of the young people reported experiencing homophobic or transphobic bullying in school. Only 8 of the 23 young people had reported the bullying. Reasons given for not reporting such bullying incidents included being afraid to speak up, a belief that it would not help the situation, teachers already knew about it and did nothing about it, fear of repercussions of reporting and fear of being labeled a "snitch".

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<sup>76</sup>Ombudsman for Children (2012) Dealing with bullying in schools. A consultation with children & young people. Dublin: Ombudsman for Children's Office. p.28

The young people reported that supportive parents, teachers and social workers and zero tolerance of bullying made them feel comfortable in reporting homophobic or transphobic bullying in school.

When asked to suggest actions that the school could take to help tackle homophobic and transphobic bullying, the young people made a range of suggestions which can be summarised as follows:

- Educate more about LGBT issues from a young age
- Be more observant of pupils
- Have a gay day
- Education
- New school ethos
- Awareness programmes
- Strict rule enforcement
- BeLonG To teacher training
- Talks and workshops
- Suspend the bully
- Take more measures instead of just talking about it
- Stop just warning them
- Anti bullying campaigns
- Have teachers keep an eye on students and deal more strictly with them
- Learn about the effects of bullying.







What are schools already required to do?

**“Every school must have in place a policy, which includes specific measures to deal with bullying behaviour.”**

## 5. What are schools already required to do?

Schools are already subject to a number of legal provisions and required to implement a range of measures that are relevant to preventing and tackling bullying in schools.

For example, there are a number of relevant international conventions to which Ireland is a party including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). There are Constitutional requirements requiring fair procedures. Schools also have duties and responsibilities under a number of national laws including under the Equal Status Acts and the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act as well as their duties and responsibilities under the common and criminal law.

In addition to the broader national framework, the Education Act 1998 and other education specific legislation sets out duties and responsibilities which are aimed at encouraging and enabling schools to create safe, positive, respectful and inclusive environments for learning.

There are also a number of relevant national strategies including the Intercultural Education Strategy 2010 - 2015<sup>77</sup> and the Report and

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<sup>77</sup> <http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Intercultural-Education-Strategy/Intercultural-Education-Strategy.html>

Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy.<sup>78</sup>

Some of the duties and responsibilities already in place are summarised below.

### 5.1. Equal Status Acts

As outlined in a joint publication of the then Department of Education and Science and the Equality Authority, schools have clear duties and responsibilities in relation to Irish equality legislation<sup>79</sup>.

In brief:

- The Equal Status Acts prohibit harassment on any of the nine grounds: gender (including transgender), civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller community.
- Sexual harassment is prohibited.
- These prohibitions apply to all aspects of school life, for example, classrooms, sport fields or school tours.
- Schools may not permit students to harass other students. This prohibition also applies to staff, parents or anyone else who has a

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<sup>78</sup> [www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/traveller\\_ed\\_strat.pdf](http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/traveller_ed_strat.pdf)

<sup>79</sup> Department of Education & Science and Equality Authority (2005) Schools and the Equal Status Acts. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Dublin: Department of Education and Science [www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/ge\\_schools\\_and\\_equality.pdf](http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Education-Reports/ge_schools_and_equality.pdf)

right to be in the school, including school visitors, such as visiting sports teams or debating teams.

- Under the Equal Status Acts, schools may be liable for any harassment by their staff or others whether or not it was done with a school's approval.

The Equal Status Acts outline the standard of duty for a school:

- Schools should take 'such steps as are reasonably practical to prevent' the above forms of harassment.
- 'Reasonable steps' could include having a policy against harassment or sexual harassment, having proper procedures to address any actions, and ensuring that they do not recur.
- Such reasonable steps are a defense for the responsible person at a school.

It is also important to note that the Equal Status Acts apply to all schools, regardless of religious ethos, and legally prohibits harassment on the grounds of lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender identity.

In addition, under the Equality Legislation a single incident can constitute harassment and the behaviour complained of does not need to be of a persistent nature.

## **5.2. Employment Equality Acts 1998-2008**

Boards of Management or Management Authorities as employers have certain obligations towards their employees. The Employment Equality Acts have similarities to the Equal Status Acts but deal with the employment arena as opposed to the provision of services.

In summary the Employment Equality Acts:

- Prohibit harassment of an employee (including agency workers or vocational trainees) on the basis of gender (including transgender) civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller community in the workplace or in the course of employment by another employee; the employer; and clients, customers or other business contacts of an employer;
- Define harassment as any form of unwanted conduct related to any of the discriminatory grounds. Sexual harassment is any form of unwanted verbal, nonverbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. In both cases it is conduct which has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity and creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for the person;
- Deem harassment as discrimination by the employer.

- Provide that it is a defense for an employer to prove that the employer took reasonably practicable steps to prevent the person harassing or sexually harassing the victim; or
- Prevent the employee (where relevant) from being treated differently in the workplace or in the course of employment (and to reverse its effects if it has occurred).

A code of practice on sexual harassment and harassment at work has been devised to give guidance to employers and has a statutory basis under SI 208/2012.

### **5.3. Safety, Health & Welfare at Work Act 2005**

Health and Safety legislation requires Boards of Management, as employers, to provide in as far as reasonably practicable, a safe place of work for employees. Boards of Management are also required to ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, that students, parents and visitors, who may be on the school premises, are not exposed to risks to their health and safety.

The legislation further requires the Boards of Management to conduct their business, as far as reasonably practicable, in ways that prevent improper conduct or behaviour likely to put the safety, health or welfare at work of employees, or the health and

safety of students, parents or visitors, at risk.

### **5.4. Education (Welfare) Act 2000**

Under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000, all schools are required to have in place a Code of Behaviour. This code must be drawn up in accordance with the guidelines of the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) which were issued to schools in 2008.

These guidelines make it clear that each school must have policies to prevent or address bullying and harassment and schools must make clear in their code of behaviour that bullying is unacceptable.

The guidelines further state that the code of behaviour should indicate what action the school will take in relation to alleged breaches of the school's bullying policy.

This code must be developed through consultation with the whole school community (boards of management, principals, teachers, other school staff, parents and students/pupils).

As the NEWB guidelines for schools indicate **"The way in which the code is developed shapes its success"**<sup>80</sup>.

The guidelines also highlight that **"The work of auditing and reviewing the code of behaviour is enriched when all the members of the school**

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<sup>80</sup> National Educational Welfare Board (2008) Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for schools. Dublin: NEWB. p. 12.

community have an opportunity to contribute.....Work on the code should take advantage of the diversity of the experience, insights, skills, needs and knowledge of people in the school community. It is important to include groups or individuals who might be marginalised or who are hard to engage".<sup>81</sup>

The NEWB is currently developing guidelines for schools on the preparation of attendance strategies to accompany its previous work to assist schools in developing codes of behaviour. These guidelines will reinforce the message that schools must seek to actively combat bullying as one of the factors which may negatively impact on school attendance.

### **5.5. Anti-Bullying Policies**

The Department of Education and Skills issued *Guidelines on Countering Bullying Behaviour* in 1993 as an aid to schools in devising measures to prevent and deal with instances of bullying behaviour. These guidelines were drawn up following consultation with representatives of school management, teachers and parents.

As a further aid to post-primary schools the Department published in 2006 a template that can be used by post-primary schools in developing an anti-bullying policy.

Most of the submissions to the working group, while attesting to the value of the guidelines and the continued relevance of the content, called for revision and updating of the guidelines and the anti-bullying template. Many suggested that the guidelines should be revised and updated and should address different forms of bullying such as homophobic, racist, membership of the Traveller community, ethnic origin and family composition (for example, second families, single parent families, lesbian and gay headed families) and should address cyber bullying. The working group agrees with the submissions in this regard.

Some submissions received question the mandatory nature of anti-bullying policies for schools. It is the opinion of the working group that every school must have in place a policy, within the framework of the school's overall school code of behaviour, which includes specific measures to deal with bullying behaviour.

Any new anti-bullying guidelines for schools need to clearly set out the overall framework in which schools work and need to reflect developments in recent years including the statutory requirement for all schools to have a code of behaviour, the links to other relevant strategies

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<sup>81</sup> National Educational Welfare Board (2008) *Developing a Code of Behaviour: Guidelines for schools*. Dublin: NEWB. p. 12.

(including the *NEPS Continuum of Support Guidelines*<sup>82</sup> and the *Well-Being in Post-Primary Schools: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention (2013)*<sup>83</sup> which are due to be published soon) and school-based and other services.

In recent years, the Department has also collaborated with the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN) on the production of materials to assist schools in dealing with homophobic bullying. These materials have been endorsed by the main education partners at post-primary level and are available on the Department's website and on the GLEN website. They were also issued to schools.

## 5.6. Education Act 1998

Under the 1998 Education Act, schools are managed by the school Board of Management, on behalf of the school patrons and trustees or Vocational Education Committee. It is the management authority that employs the school's teachers and other staff members. In VEC schools,

the VEC is the employer. The school principal manages the school on a day to day basis.

### 5.6.1. School Ethos

The term 'ethos' is used to describe the characteristic spirit of a school, that permeates all aspects of school life from the formal curriculum taught in the classroom to the day to day life of the school and its community. While the Education Act 1998 does not use the word 'ethos' it sets out related responsibilities of the school and the Board of Management:

- The Act sets out the function of the school in *promoting the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students and providing health education in consultation with parents, having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school.*
- The Act also states that the board shall *uphold, and be accountable to the patron for so upholding, the characteristic spirit of the school as determined by the cultural, educational, moral, religious, social, linguistic and spiritual values and traditions which inform and are characteristic of the objectives and conduct of the school.*
- The Act makes further references to *the characteristic spirit of the school in relation to curriculum and the schools admissions policy.*

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<sup>82</sup> National Educational Psychological Service, Department of Education and Skills (2010a) Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties: A Continuum of Support, Guidelines for Teachers

NEPS (2010b) A Continuum of Support for Post-Primary Schools: Guidelines for Teachers

NEPS (2010c) Continuum of Support for Post-Primary Schools: Resource Pack for Teachers

<sup>83</sup> Department of Education and Skills, Department of Health (2013): Well-Being in Post-Primary Schools: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention.



A core value in most schools is treating all students equally and with respect; the holistic care of all students is integral to this. This means supporting students who are vulnerable, including those who are vulnerable to bullying, as is the case for many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students, students with disabilities or special educational needs, children and young people from the Traveller Community, students of ethnic minority or migrant origins and students of minority religious faiths.

#### **5.6.2. Schools with a Religious Ethos**

Individual churches have specific traditions and beliefs; schools with a religious ethos will seek to pass these on to the students in their care. However this should not preclude a school from ensuring that all students and teachers feel safe and affirmed in their unique human identity.

Several presentations to the working group highlighted that some school staff and students have been told that their school ethos prevents them from addressing homophobic bullying. In the DES-funded report, *Valuing Visibility*<sup>84</sup>, participants noted that there was a lack of clarity in relation to how issues of sexual orientation related to school ethos. Many considered that this limited their

response to the issues as they arose and was a barrier to responding positively to LGBT students. All participants suggested that the role of Boards of Management and Trustees was extremely important in terms of providing leadership and direction to schools in making sure that school policy and practice explicitly deal with homophobic bullying.

DCU research (Norman et al) found that this lack of clarity limited teachers' ability to respond positively to students who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual. This created silences about LGBT issues that risked isolating members of those minority groups.<sup>85</sup>

The working group acknowledges that many schools founded within particular religious traditions take pride in values such as identifying and serving the needs of all students.

#### **5.6.3. Complaints procedures**

The DES does not get involved in individual complaints in schools. Bullying complaints are dealt with at local level through the school's anti-bullying procedures which should outline how incidents of bullying will be dealt with.

In relation to complaints about school staff (which may include bullying complaints), most schools use complaints procedures which have

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<sup>84</sup> Lodge A. et al (2008) *Valuing Visibility: An exploration of how sexual orientation issues arise and are addressed in post-primary schools*. Dublin: GLEN,

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<sup>85</sup> Norman, James; Galvin, Miriam and Gerry McNamara. (2006). *Straight Talk: Researching Gay and Lesbian Issues in the School Curriculum*. Dublin: Centre for Educational Evaluation, DCU.

been agreed by the respective teacher unions and management bodies. These procedures lay out the stages to be followed in progressing a complaint against a teacher or other member of the school staff and the specific timescale to be followed at each stage.

Typically, if a parent has sought to resolve their complaint with the teacher and the school principal and is not happy that their complaint has been resolved they can formally lodge their complaint with the chairperson of the school's board of management. In the case of VEC schools, they can contact the Vocational Education Committee.

If a parent has exhausted the school's complaints procedure and is still not satisfied, they can make a complaint to the Ombudsman for Children.

The Office of the Ombudsman for Children may independently investigate complaints received from children about schools recognised by the Department of Education and Skills.

The key criterion for any intervention by the Ombudsman for Children is that the action of the school has or may have had an adverse effect on a child.

The Equality Tribunal may also investigate complaints under one of the nine grounds covered by the Equal Status Acts. The complainant must be over 18 years of age or the

complaint can be made by a parent or legal guardian.

The working group welcomes the fact that the Department is currently reviewing Section 28 of the Education Act 1998 which relates to grievances.

#### **5.6.4. Guidance**

Guidance in schools refers to the range of learning experiences provided to students to assist them develop self-management skills which will lead to effective choices and decisions about their lives. It encompasses the separate areas of personal and social development, educational and career guidance.<sup>86</sup>

Each school is required, in accordance with the Education Act 1998, to use its available resources to "ensure that students have access to appropriate guidance" (Section 9(c)). Following Budget 2012, the provision of guidance is now managed from within the standard staffing allocation for each school.

*Planning the School Guidance Programme* was coordinated and published by the National Council for Guidance in Education (NCGE) in the light of the requirements of sections 9(c) and 21 of the Education Act 1998).

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<sup>86</sup> Guidelines for Second Level Schools on the Implications of Section 9 (c) of the Education Act 1998, relating to students' access to appropriate guidance, DES, 2005.

The publication<sup>87</sup> was intended to assist schools in developing their guidance plan as part of the overall School Plan. It is established policy that guidance is a whole school activity and under existing arrangements each school develops a school guidance plan as a means of supporting the needs of its students.<sup>88</sup>

The *Well-Being in Post-Primary Schools: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention (2013)*, which will be published shortly, outline in detail for schools how this can best be achieved. In addition, adopting the *National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) Continuum of Support* approach, in primary and post-primary schools, provides for early identification and provision for interventions with students who present with significant needs related to bullying behaviour.

The Whole School Guidance Plan and the Continuum of Support approach make provision for student support structures. Effective student support structures in schools ensure that young people with difficulties are identified, supported and provided with appropriate help. Internal and

external referral pathways should be identified as part of the guidance plan.

#### 5.6.5. Curriculum

Within its provisions, the Education Act 1998 emphasises that schools should promote the social and personal development of students and provide health education for them.

The processes of all teaching and learning have implications for personal and social development. The ways in which members of the school staff relate to one another and to the students, and the quality of relationships between the students themselves, form the foundation for personal and social development in a school.

There is space within the teaching of all subjects to: foster an attitude of respect for all; promote value for diversity; address prejudice and stereotyping; and to highlight that bullying behaviour is unacceptable.

In addition, the curriculum provides opportunities for students to consider their attitudes and their safety when online and make informed decisions about their health, personal lives and social development in this context.

There are a number of curriculum components and programmes which are particularly relevant to the prevention of bullying and promotion of respect for diversity and

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<sup>87</sup>National Centre for Guidance in Education (2004) Planning the School Guidance Programme. Dublin: NCGE.

<sup>88</sup> The National Centre for Guidance in Education and GLEN recently produced resources on the role of guidance counsellors in supporting LGBT students. These are available at [www.glen.ie/attachments/the\\_role\\_of\\_guidance\\_counsellors.pdf](http://www.glen.ie/attachments/the_role_of_guidance_counsellors.pdf)

inclusiveness. These are highlighted below.

### 5.7. Stay Safe Programme

With reference to the *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools 2011*, all primary schools are also required to implement the Child Abuse Prevention Programme (CAPP), more commonly referred to as the *Stay Safe Programme*. The aim of the programme is to reduce vulnerability to child abuse and bullying.

The Stay Safe programme is a personal safety skills programme designed for use with primary school children from Junior Infants through to 6th class. The programme seeks to enhance children's self-protective skills by participation in lessons on safe and unsafe situations, bullying, inappropriate touch, secrets, telling and stranger danger.

The programme aims to give children the skills necessary to enable them to recognise and resist abuse and /or victimisation and teaches them that they should always tell (an adult that can help) about any situation which they find unsafe, upsetting, threatening, dangerous or abusive.

However, the working group noted that this programme requires updating.

### 5.8. Social, Personal & Health Education<sup>89</sup>

Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) is a mandatory component of both the primary curriculum and the current junior-cycle curriculum at post primary level.

SPHE is intended to support the personal development, health and well-being of young people and help them to create and maintain supportive relationships. It is an aspect of the school curriculum through which positive and lasting influences can be exerted towards forming students' attitudes and values.

Both the primary and post-primary SPHE syllabuses allocate time for exploring bullying, as well as the interrelated areas of belonging and integrating, communication, conflict, friendship, personal safety and relationships.<sup>90</sup>

SPHE provides students with a unique opportunity to develop the skills and competence to learn about themselves and to care for themselves and others, and to make informed decisions about their health,

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<sup>89</sup>The SPHE Support Services, the HSE, GLEN and BeLongTo have developed a new resource 'Growing up LGBT' designed to increase respect for diversity across all years of second level.

<sup>90</sup>Examples include the Webwise Primary Programme published in 2012. Its delivery is supported by the Respectful Communication Online module of the Garda Schools Primary Programme.

personal lives and social development. It is particularly important that young people are provided with SPHE given current concerns about mental health and general well being.

Some of the credit for many of the excellent quality SPHE programmes established in schools is due to the conviction, commitment and continuing support of principals and boards of management. Such support often finds its basis in the understanding that providing for the personal and social development of young people is a prerequisite for successful learning.

### **5.9. Importance of SPHE and the new Junior Cycle Framework**

The new *Framework for Junior Cycle* (October 2012) is underpinned by eight principles, including 'Well-being' and 'Inclusive Education'. The Framework makes clear that throughout the junior cycle, students will acquire a range of key skills, including: Managing myself; Staying well; Communicating; and Working with others.

The Framework identifies twenty-four learning statements. These statements describe what students should know, understand, value and be able to do at the end of junior cycle. This includes that the student:

- Has an awareness of personal values and an understanding of

the process of moral decision making;

- Appreciates and respects how diverse values, beliefs and traditions have contributed to the communities and culture in which she/he lives;
- Has the awareness, knowledge, skills, values and motivation to live sustainably;
- Takes action to safeguard and promote her / his wellbeing and that of others;
- Uses technology and digital media tools to learn, communicate, work and think collaboratively and creatively in a responsible and ethical manner.

Five of the twenty-four statements of learning can be met through SPHE. All of this is highly supportive of the understanding that the social, personal and health education offered to our young people is as important as any other area of the curriculum. In light of the previously identified principles and key skills, and considering the contribution that it is envisaged SPHE can make to students' achievement of five of the statements of learning, it is important that principals and boards of management recognise the importance of continuing to provide all students with SPHE, either as a stand alone subject or as a short course.

### **5.10. Relationships & Sexuality Programme**

An interim curriculum for the Relationships and Sexuality Programme (RSE) was developed in 1996 and all schools have been required to teach it since that time. However it was always intended that it would be an integral part of a wider Social, Personal and Health Education programme. This is now the case at primary level and at post-primary level up to Junior Cycle. While a draft Senior Cycle SPHE curriculum has been developed, there is no requirement on schools to timetable SPHE in senior cycle currently. However, schools are required to teach RSE at Senior Cycle, even in the absence of a timetabled SPHE class.

RSE encourages children and young people to reflect on the relationships in their lives and to learn how to develop relationships which are based on mutual respect. This helps them to build a foundation for more intimate relationships in later life. RSE promotes a holistic understanding of sexuality and provides young people with information about their physical development and sexual health.

### **5.11. Civic, Social & Political Education**

Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) is part of the Junior Certificate Core Curriculum, since September 1997. It is a course in Active Citizenship, based on Human Rights and Social Responsibilities. It provides

scope for exploring, amongst other topics, rights and responsibilities, a sense of belonging, stereotyping and prejudice.

CSPE provides opportunities for students to examine online privacy in the context of rights and responsibilities, raise awareness of cyber bullying in their school communities, and create a class/school charter of online rights and responsibilities.

In the Framework for Junior Cycle (2012), one of the Statements of Learning requires that a student “values what it means to be an active citizen, with rights and responsibilities in local and wider contexts”.

### **5.12. Child Protection Procedures**

*Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2011 (Children First)* deals with the recognition, reporting and management of child safety concerns. It sets out a number of key messages relating to the duty to protect children. Among these are:

- that the safety and welfare of children is everyone's responsibility;
- that children will have safer lives, where everyone is attentive to their well being; and
- that people who work with children across a range of areas understand their personal responsibility for safe practice in their organisation, the reporting of



concerns and co-operation with statutory bodies.

*Children First* recognises that bullying impacts on the well-being of children and young people. The Government has committed, as a priority, to the introduction of legislation to underpin *Children First*. The purpose of the legislation will be to ensure that organisations and professionals who work with children have a statutory responsibility to report reasonable concerns about the abuse or neglect of children to the HSE Child and Family Services. In relation to bullying in schools, *Children First* states:

*"It is recognised that bullying in schools is a particular problem. It is imperative that school management boards should have a policy in place to deal with bullying and that teachers are aware of this policy and of procedural guidelines to deal with it. In situations where the incident is serious and where the behaviour is regarded as potentially abusive, the school should consult the HSE Children and Family Services with a view to drawing up an appropriate response, such as a management plan."*

*In the first instance, it is the school authorities that are responsible for dealing with bullying in school. School authorities should exercise this responsibility by having regard to the existing advice and to the Guidelines on countering bullying*

*behaviour in primary and post-primary schools from the Department of Education (1993).*

*Serious instances of bullying behaviour should be referred to the HSE Children and Family Services."<sup>91</sup>*

It is the view of the working group that there is a lack of clarity for schools and others as to what is meant by the phrase "serious" bullying in this context and how one would determine when a referral to the HSE is required. It is recommended that more detailed guidance should be provided by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs for schools and others as to what constitutes "serious bullying" under *Children First* and when referrals to the HSE should be made.

The Department of Education and Skills has also issued Child Protection Procedures to Primary and Post-Primary Schools which are based on the *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* 2011 and which apply to all primary and post-primary schools.

The new procedures incorporate significant improvements to the previous school guidelines and are intended to better ensure consistent and uniform implementation of *Children First* across all schools. The improvements include a new

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<sup>91</sup>Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2011) *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children*. Dublin: Department of Children and Youth Affairs. p. 61.

template child protection policy, a requirement that all primary schools fully implement the Stay Safe programme and improved oversight arrangements at Board of Management level. The new procedures also restated the existing mandatory requirement to teach SPHE at primary and second level.

The Child Protection Procedures provide that, in the first instance, it is the school authority that is responsible for dealing with bullying in schools. However, in accordance with the Children First, the procedures state that serious incidences of bullying behaviour should be reported to the HSE.

#### **5.13. Services to support schools**

A range of services can provide support to schools in their efforts to prevent and manage bullying. While access to services may vary from region to region, the working group is aware of a range of services and supports which are currently available to primary and second level schools. These are listed in appendix 4. Schools should identify the range of services available locally, and build networks and relevant contacts to support their work.

#### **5.14. Use of external resources**

National and international research has consistently shown that the qualified classroom teacher is the best placed professional to work sensitively

and consistently with students and that s/he can have a powerful impact on influencing students' attitudes, values and behaviour in all aspects of health education.

School management, principals and teachers have a duty to provide the best quality and most appropriate social, personal and health education for their students. They also have a duty to protect students in their care at all times from any potentially harmful, inappropriate or misguided resources, interventions or programmes.

The Department has issued circulars to schools setting out guidance for the use of external resources in the context of the SPHE and RSE programmes. Under these circulars, visitors to the classroom or school, particularly those engaging directly with students, should be aware of relevant school policies and visits should be carefully planned in advance in line with relevant school policies, data protection requirements, etc.

Visits should be planned, researched and implemented in partnership with school personnel. It is strongly recommended that parents should be consulted and made aware of any such visiting people or agencies to classrooms / schools.

All programmes and events delivered by visitors and external agencies must



use appropriate, evidence-based methodologies with clear educational outcomes. Such programmes are best delivered by those specifically qualified to work with the young people for whom the programmes are designed.

The circulars also highlight the fact that research findings indicate that certain teaching approaches have limited effect and are counterproductive to the effective implementation of SPHE and therefore should be avoided. The approaches that are listed as ineffective are:

- **Scare tactics** – information that induces fear, and exaggerates negative consequences, is inappropriate and counter productive.
- **Sensational interventions** – Interventions that glamorise or portray risky behaviour in an exciting way are inappropriate and can encourage risk taking.
- **Testimonials** – Stories focused on previous dangerous lifestyles can encourage the behaviour they were designed to prevent by creating heroes / heroines of individuals who give testimony.
- **Information only interventions** – Programmes which are based on information alone are very limited in the learning outcomes they can achieve and can in fact be counter productive in influencing values, attitudes and behaviour.
- **Once off/short term interventions** – Short-term interventions, whether planned or in reaction to a crisis, are ineffective.
- **Normalising young people's risky behaviour** – Giving the impression to young people, directly or indirectly, that all their peers will engage / are engaging in risky behaviours could put pressure on them to do things they would not otherwise do.
- **Didactic approach** – Didactic approaches which are solely directive in nature are ineffective in the successful implementation of SPHE/RSE.

## 5.15. Key Findings and Recommendations

- The working group acknowledges that the majority of schools have anti-bullying policies and other related policies in place and that many schools regularly review these policies to keep them up-to-date.
- All schools are legally required to have an anti-bullying policy.
- The working group acknowledges the positive work being done in many schools and we consider that a school's ethos cannot, and should not, be a barrier to:
  - promoting a school that recognises, respects and values all identities, including those of LGBT members of their school community;
  - comprehensive delivery of curriculum subjects like RSE and SPHE; and
  - tackling homophobic bullying.
- There is space within the teaching of all subjects to: foster an attitude of respect for all; promote value for diversity; address prejudice and stereotyping; and to highlight that bullying behaviour is unacceptable.
- There are a number of curriculum components and programmes which are particularly relevant to the prevention of bullying and promotion of respect for diversity and inclusiveness including CSPE, RSE, SPHE and Stay Safe;
- With reference to the Framework for Junior Cycle, it is important that principals and boards of management recognise the importance of continuing to provide all students with SPHE, either as a stand alone subject or as a short course.
- It is recommended that more detailed guidance should be provided by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs for schools and others as to what constitutes "serious bullying" under Children First and when referrals to the HSE should be made.





Do we need more legislation?

## 6. Do we need more legislation?

During the course of the working group's deliberations, a number of submissions, presenters and public commentators raised the need to have more legislation in Ireland to tackle bullying.

In terms of anti-bullying policies, as already stated, it is the opinion of the working group that every school must have in place an anti-bullying policy, within the framework of the school's overall school code of behaviour, which includes specific measures to deal with bullying behaviour. This requirement is already on a legal footing as a result of section 23(3) of the Education (Welfare) Act, though this requirement may not be fully understood by all schools.

There is clearly work to be done in updating the existing DES bullying guidelines, reinforcing the existence of the requirement and supporting schools in developing and implementing effective policies and practice.

### 6.1. Legislation in other jurisdictions

Many commentators have referred to recent legislation in the US and called for such an approach in Ireland. The working group has considered some of the legislative provisions in other jurisdictions and would caution against some of the approaches taken. In particular, the working group is not satisfied that additional

criminal sanctions against children and young people are the appropriate legal approach.

The working group would also like to highlight that there are significant differences in the use of the term 'bullying' in the US compared to Ireland. The terms bullying and harassment in the US are largely associated with traits protected by the federal civil rights law which includes harassment based on "race, color, national origin, sex or disability".<sup>92</sup> However, some States have widened the definition of bullying in their anti-bullying provisions.<sup>93</sup>

The working group also has concerns that some of the approaches taken in other jurisdictions may not effectively underpin a whole school community approach advocated by the majority of stakeholders, which is backed up by findings from numerous research projects. For instance, some legislative approaches only deal with bullying which takes place on school property or at school related events, or which involves the use of school equipment.

However, there are initiatives such as the recent enactment of the Youth Bullying Prevention Act, 2012 in

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<sup>92</sup><http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201010.html>

<sup>93</sup><http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/secletter/bullying.doc>

Washington D.C. which merit further consideration. This legislation has a broader remit and requires agencies, educational institutions and others that work with young people to establish bullying prevention policies and provides that they can establish bullying prevention programmes. The legislation also provides for an appeals process to follow initial investigations of bullying incidents; prohibits retaliation against a target, witness, or reporter of bullying and provides immunity for an employee, volunteer, or youth who in good faith reports an incident of bullying.

Legislation in other jurisdictions is unlikely to be a perfect fit for the Irish context; however, there may be elements of approaches in other jurisdictions which could work here in Ireland.

## **6.2. What more can be done?**

The working group had a wide ranging discussion on whether new legislation was required, what objectives new legislation might have and whether legislation should be school-specific. The working group has come to the conclusion that, at this time, the focus should be on securing implementation of existing legislative requirements across the system rather than seeking to introduce new legislation.

The working group is of the opinion that the question of introducing further legislative provisions needs to be considered in the overall context of existing legislation, the ongoing reviews of certain legislation, effective legislation in other jurisdictions and in the context of the working groups proposal for a national framework for bullying (outlined in the final chapter of this report).

In that regard, the working group would strongly recommend the implementation of the actions proposed in this report to support the school system in effectively preventing and tackling bullying in schools in the first instance.

We are recommending that an implementation group be established to oversee the implementation of the proposed actions and this group could be tasked with reviewing how these measures have been implemented and consider the need for further legislation in that context.

As referred to earlier the working group welcomes the DES review of Section 28 of the Education Act 1998 in relation to complaints procedures and recommends that the findings and recommendations in this action plan are considered as part of that review.

The working group further welcomes Government commitments to legislate for new enrolment policies for all schools, and the Programme for Government commitment to amend Section 37 of the Employment Equality Act 1998. Delivering these legislative changes could deliver substantial positive impacts on the whole school community culture.

The working group also acknowledges the initiative taken by the Minister for Justice and Equality to have the Non-Fatal Offences Against the Person Act 1997 referred to the Law Reform Commission for consideration following reported difficulties in bringing successful prosecutions particularly in the context of cyber bullying.

As part of its review, the working group has identified a number of mechanisms through which some complaints can be escalated, in particular circumstances, these include:

- The Ombudsman for Children can investigate complaints made by children or adults. They cannot investigate actual bullying allegations but can review how these were dealt with by a school;
- The Gardaí, including Garda Juvenile Liaison Officers, can be notified of school and non-school based incidents;

- Concerns can be reported about the abuse or neglect of children to the HSE Child and Family Services under Children First guidelines.
- The Equality Tribunal can investigate complaints under one of the nine grounds. Complainants must be over 18 to make a complaint or complaints can be considered if they are made by a parent or legal guardian of under 18s;
- The Health and Safety Authority can assess systems for dealing with work place related bullying complaints and where required, use powers of enforcement;
- The Teaching Council will have a future role in investigating complaints in relation to teachers' fitness to teach and standards of conduct.

The working group would welcome a further in-depth analysis of specific investigative processes in other jurisdictions which could usefully inform the development of any proposed improvements to the Irish system for investigating complaints.



### 6.3. Key Findings and Recommendations

- The working group has come to the conclusion that, at this time, the focus should be on securing implementation of existing legislative requirements across the system rather than seeking to introduce new legislation.
- The working group is of the opinion that the question of any further legislative proposals need to be considered in the overall context of existing legislation, the ongoing reviews of certain legislation, effective legislation in other jurisdictions and in the context of the working groups proposal for a national framework for bullying (outlined in the final chapter of this report).
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- The working group would welcome a further in-depth analysis of specific investigative processes in other jurisdictions which could usefully inform the development of any proposed improvements to the Irish system for investigating complaints.



Responses to bullying in schools

**“The message that bullying is never acceptable, that it is wrong, that it is not a normal part of growing up needs to be upheld.”**

## 7. School Based Approaches

There is potential for bullying where ever adults, young people and children gather. Therefore, we all have a responsibility to work to prevent bullying from occurring and to intervene effectively when it does happen.

There is a now a huge body of research available on how schools can effectively tackling bullying and the working group has considered some of this as part of its work. Some of the key issues and findings are outlined below.

### 7.1. Research on school based anti-bullying programmes

Various anti-bullying programmes have been tried in schools in many countries and evaluations reveal that programmes have had varying levels of success in reducing levels of bullying in schools. Programmes typically include both prevention and intervention features and a range of components and techniques. However, conclusions on the level of effectiveness and the conditions for effect vary widely.

Some reviews (Ferguson et al., 2007<sup>94</sup>; Merrell et al., 2008<sup>95</sup>) concluded that

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<sup>94</sup>Ferguson, C. et al (2007) "The effectiveness of school-based anti-bullying programme: A meta analytic review". *Criminal Justice Review*, Vol. 32, No. 4, December 2007 p. 401-414.

<sup>95</sup> Merrell, K. et al (2008) "How Effective Are School Bullying Intervention Programs? A Meta-Analysis of Intervention Research". *School Psychology Quarterly*, vol. 23, 1, p. 26-42.

anti-bullying programmes had little effect on school bullying. Others contest this, including the Farrington and Ttofi 2009 report<sup>96</sup>. This report along with other recent systematic reviews and meta analyses of school based programmes finds that many reports of evaluation do not provide sufficient data to allow reliable calculation of effectiveness.

The Farrington Ttofi report concluded that of 89 reports reviewed only 44 provided data that allowed for effect size. Of those that could be reviewed the conclusion emerged that bullying decreased by 20-23% and victimization by 17-20%. However, research shows that the intensity and duration of programmes are directly related to their effectiveness<sup>97</sup>.

In 2011 the Swedish National Agency for Education produced a report on an evaluation of eight anti-bullying programmes which were widely used in Swedish schools<sup>98</sup>. The report found that no school used just one programme but rather used components from several programmes. It concluded that "**no specific single programme can be recommended in it's entirety for compulsory schools in Sweden**" and

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<sup>96</sup>Farrington, D. & M. Ttofi, (2009) School-Based Programs to Reduce Bullying and Victimization. *Campbell Systematic Reviews* Vol. 6

<sup>97</sup>Farrington, D. & M. Ttofi, (2009) School-Based Programs to Reduce Bullying and Victimization. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, vol. 6. p. 66.

<sup>98</sup>Flygare, E. et al(2011) Report 353: Evaluation of Anti-bullying Methods. Stockholm: Skolverket (Swedish National Agency for Education).

that “measures for combating degrading treatment and bullying should be based on the school's own circumstances”<sup>99</sup>. These findings reflect a broad trend in research which focuses on effective components of bullying programmes rather than entire programmes.

The Swedish evaluation shows that there is a difference between measures that reduce bullying of girls and those that reduce bullying of boys.

In addition, in his presentation to the working group, Dr. Stephen Minton argued that the behavioural management/awareness-raising approach that has dominated the design, strategies and resources used in whole-school anti-bullying programmes to-date is not adequate in addressing the prejudices that underpin at least some bullying behaviour.

The working group found that elements of some programmes remain controversial; peer mediation for example is a conflict resolution approach designed to involve students in the peacemaking process.

It is argued by supporters of the approach that peer mediators understand their peers more than adults, that the process puts the

control into the hands of the students themselves, that mediation emphasises personal responsibility rather than external accountability and that it develops social skills for all involved.

The opposing argument maintains that while peer involvement may be useful in *conflict situations*, not only is peer mediation an ineffective approach to bullying but it can also lead to an increase in victimisation.

Professors Farrington and Ttofi found that “work with peers was associated with an increase in victimization”.<sup>100</sup> Proponents of this view point to the power imbalance implicit in bullying which takes the context beyond a conflict resolution situation, and which makes it difficult for the aggressor to confront the bullied. Students who are victimised are usually not very good at advocating for themselves. It is also argued that the students do not have sufficient intellectual and emotional maturity to mediate in the complexity of bullying situations.

The recent Swedish Evaluation 2011,<sup>101</sup> found that “Bullying of boys increases with the measure pupils as players, i.e. specially designated pupils who have received training and who function as

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<sup>99</sup>Flygare, E. *et al*(2011) Report 353: Evaluation of Anti-bullying Methods. Stockholm: Skolverket (Swedish National Agency for Education). p. 26 and 27.

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<sup>100</sup> Farrington and Ttofi 2009 School-Based Programs to Reduce Bullying and Victimization David P. Farrington, Maria M. Ttofi Campbell Systematic Reviews 2009:6

<sup>101</sup>Flygare, E. *et al*(2011) Report 353: Evaluation of Anti-bullying Methods. Stockholm: Skolverket (Swedish National Agency for Education).P. 18.

observers or rapporteurs, such as peer supports. These pupils have a role to play in preventive work as the staff's eyes and ears. ...Just like pupils who act as mediators, peer supports say they feel that the task is difficult, that they have a burden of responsibility, and that sometimes they are victimised by other pupils because of their role". It goes on to point to the efficacy of student involvement in preventative measures but not in dealing with actual bullying incidents.

There is a corresponding lack of agreement on approaches such as Restorative Justice, No Blame and Group Therapy with supporters and critics of these also.

It is clear that the problem of bullying is complex and that no one intervention works in all situations.

International and national research continues to evolve in this area and progress and effectiveness of particular approaches continues to be reviewed.

## **7.2. Core elements of a school based approach to tackling bullying**

Taking into account all of the research reviewed and submissions and presentations received, the working group is not recommending a particular anti-bullying programme, however, we would like to highlight the following core principles that we think should underpin a schools

approach to preventing and tackling bullying.

These are:

- A positive school culture and climate;
- School-wide approach;
- Effective Leadership;
- A shared understanding of what bullying is and its impact;
- Anti-bullying policies;
- Consistent recording of reported bullying behaviour;
- Education and Training;
- Prevention strategies including awareness raising;
- Established evidence-based intervention strategies.

These principles are summarised in the following sections.

### **7.2.1. A positive school culture and climate**

A keystone of preventing bullying is a school culture and climate that is positive and welcoming of difference and diversity, and based on inclusivity. Key to this are respectful relationships across the school community (including students, teachers, non-teaching staff, school management, parents and all visitors to the school). This encompasses relationships with their peers (e.g. student to students, teacher to teacher) and relationships between groups (e.g. teachers and students, parents and teachers etc).

In this context, the legislative amendments and initiatives referred to in the previous section, relating to enrolment and employment issues, are very welcome.

Many of the submissions considered by the working group also recommended the promotion of a school culture and climate which encourages children and young people to disclose and discuss incidents of bullying behaviour. The reluctance of children and young people to disclose incidences of bullying was a strong feature of submissions, research and the consultation with young people.

The working group recommends that schools encourage and strengthen open dialogue between all school staff and students. Schools should ensure that they provide appropriate opportunities for students to raise their concerns in an environment that is comfortable for the student. This includes issues that happen outside school, including cyber bullying. In order to accomplish this, schools may need to consider how best to address topics that are masked by prejudice and silence, such as homophobic bullying.

In relation to homophobic bullying, open dialogue can be facilitated by making efforts to create an inclusive school climate by, for example, inclusion of LGBT posters on notice boards, discussions with parents about

specific statements of welcome and respect for LGBT members of the school community, teaching the new SPHE resource, *Growing Up LGBT*, and participating in BeLonG To's annual Stand Up Awareness Week Against Homophobic Bullying.

The more open a school is to discussing bullying, the clearer the school policy is, the greater the likelihood that bystanders will intervene if they witness bullying. Most importantly students must be aware that the school is a “telling school”. Young people need to know that when they do “speak out” and report incidents of bullying, that appropriate action will be taken.

In addition, effective implementation of the SPHE curriculum in a whole school way contributes to and supports the fostering of a positive whole school environment.

In their recent paper, Sercombe and Donnelly conclude that “Organisations and institutions need to take responsibility for the development and maintenance of their internal cultures to promote non-violence. This includes the dominance practices of senior people within the organization, and the way that adults as carers or educators interact with children and young people. The message that bullying is never acceptable, that it is wrong, that it is

not a normal part of growing up needs to be upheld.”<sup>102</sup>

### **7.2.2. School-wide approach**

The importance of a whole school community approach which provides a consistent response and involves all the school community was emphasised in many of the submissions considered by the working group.

The term ‘School-wide’ has been adopted by the working group on foot of a submission from the Joint Managerial Body (JMB). As the JMB point out the term ‘whole school’ has come to mean ‘management plus teachers’ and is associated with compliance issues in the areas of curriculum and policy.

As the JMB point out “A school exists as a community within a community, with porous borders and a life-world extending way beyond its walls in terms of out-reach and in-reach. School-wide takes in the whole ecology of these communities and is a more appropriate notion as initiatives focussed solely on leaders, teachers and pupils will have limited and transient impact”.<sup>103</sup>

It was highlighted in some of the discussions around this issue that

school staff can often be afraid to raise the issue of bullying with parents because of fear of potential negative reactions from parents and the fact that the school might get blamed for the existence of bullying behaviour.

Parents need to recognise that a school openly talking about bullying is a positive development and that they need to work with their school to ensure there is a coherent, school-wide approach to tackling the issue.

### **7.2.3. Effective leadership**

In his submission to the working group, Dr. James O’Higgins Norman highlighted the need for effective leadership and the management of change.

He highlights the role of all those who hold leadership roles within the school community and the wider education sector: “While the roles of the board of management and principal are of great importance in animating a whole-school approach, leadership should also be understood to encompass the contribution of the Department of Education and Skills, as well as deputy-principals, class tutors, year heads, chaplains, guidance counsellors, subject leaders, parents councils, and even prefects and other senior students. Fundamentally, it is the responsibility of all those who are identified as leaders within the school community to ensure that practical steps are taken to challenge and respond to bullying. This can be done

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<sup>102</sup>Howard Sercombe and Brian Donnelly, Bullying and agency: definition, intervention and ethics, page 10, Journal of Youth Studies, 2012, 1-12, iFirst article.

<sup>103</sup>Joint Managerial Body. Submission to DES Working Group, June 2012. p. 2.



by principals and other leaders in the school striving to engender an ethos in the school in which bullying is unacceptable. It is also vital that school leaders involve both staff and students in developing and implementing a vision of the school where diversity is accepted and celebrated".<sup>104</sup>

Sue Morris King (HMI Ofsted) in her presentation to the group referred to the Ofsted 2012 "No place for bullying" survey in which the inspectorate visited 65 schools in the UK. Strong leadership, which supported a school culture and climate that celebrated difference, was evident in the schools with effective practice.

#### **7.2.4. A shared understanding of what bullying is and its impact**

As the Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland (ASTI) point out in their submission to the working group, "A common and shared understanding of what bullying is across the education system would represent a significant development."

A clear, widely understood definition of bullying that distinguishes between different types and methods of bullying including deliberate exclusion, malicious gossip and other forms of relational bullying; sexual

bullying; identity based bullying (specifically including homophobic and transphobic bullying, racist bullying, membership of the Traveller community and bullying of those with disabilities or special educational needs); and cyber bullying, is required.

A school-wide shared understanding of what does and does not constitute bullying is a crucial step in underpinning an effective school-wide approach. Children and young people should be encouraged to discuss the differences between banter among students and interactions that can hurt or threaten.

The impact of bullying should also be clearly understood by the school community. The Ombudsman for Children's 2012 Consultation report highlights the view of children and young people that "schools can support students to understand why the policy and respect for it are so important by highlighting through real-life stories and examples the hurt and harm that bullying can cause".<sup>105</sup>

#### **7.2.5. Anti-Bullying Policies**

It is clear that schools, as well as other organisations that work with children and young people, should develop and implement an anti-bullying policy. The policy should be reviewed

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<sup>104</sup> Dr. James O'Higgins Norman, submission to DES: Tackling Bullying and Discrimination: A Whole School Approach, page 5.

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<sup>105</sup> Ombudsman for Children (2012) Dealing with bullying in schools. A consultation with children & young people. Dublin: Ombudsman for Children's Office. p.17

on a regular basis and should provide a framework for the school's strategies, procedures and practices for preventing bullying and dealing with bullying behaviour.

The policy should provide an outline of what steps will be taken and by whom when bullying occurs, including information about how students will be supported to speak up if they are being bullied, witness bullying or are bullying, and who they can speak to.

Anti-bullying policies should form part of the school's Code of Behaviour and should be linked to other related policies (e.g. ICT Acceptable Use Policy), so that bullying is seen as a continuum of behaviour rather than something separate. The anti-bullying policy should be proofed in respect of school systems, structures and practice and this should be overseen by the Principal and the Board of Management.

The working group recommends that each policy should also have an implementation plan attached which clearly shows how the policy will be translated into practice.

Professor Mona O Moore (Trinity College Dublin) in her presentation to the group stressed the importance of each school developing a whole school policy on bullying within the framework of an overall school code of behaviour and discipline, the development of this policy would involve parents and teachers alike.

Professor O Moore felt this policy should include:

- a clear definition of bullying and the forms it takes;
- a statement that bullying is unacceptable behaviour and that it will not be tolerated;
- that pupils should support each other by reporting all instances of bullying;
- that all reports of bullying will be investigated and be dealt with sympathetically;
- a clear statement on how the school will handle an alleged case of bullying.

The above points were also emphasised by the Department's Inspectorate, the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) in their presentations to the group.

There is evidence to suggest that many parents may not be aware of schools anti-bullying policies. A recent survey undertaken by the National Parent's Council Primary found that 136 (14.7%) respondents said they didn't know whether their school had an anti-bullying policy; 227 respondents (30%) said they have not seen the anti-bullying policy and over half of respondents didn't know whether parents had been involved in

drawing up the school's anti-bullying policy.<sup>106</sup>

Children and young people should also be given meaningful opportunities to participate in the development of their school's anti-bullying policies.

Schools should ensure that students, parents/adults in children's lives and school staff at all levels are aware of the school policy, what is acceptable and unacceptable in the school environment and what actions will be taken if behaviour is deemed unacceptable.

#### **7.2.6. Consistent recording of reported bullying behaviour**

The Ofsted study highlighted the fact that effective practice in schools included consistent recording of all reports of bullying and analysis of this data to look for trends and patterns to plan future actions.

The working group recommends that schools record all reported incidents of bullying behaviour including anonymous bullying reports.

The recent Swedish study found that "Documentation of cases reduces bullying of individuals who have been subjected to it over short or long periods. At schools where documentation is carried out in

accordance with established routines, bullying of this group was reduced by 30 per cent compared with schools where there were no routines or they were not followed. Documentation of cases reduces bullying, especially physical bullying of boys".<sup>107</sup>

#### **7.2.7. Education & Training**

Many submissions highlighted the need for appropriate education and training for all school staff, management and the wider school community.

In their submission, ASTI, highlight that "What schools need is more and comprehensive expert guidance on how to implement home-school-community approaches to bullying based on common understandings of what constitutes bullying."

Again, the Ofsted study found that in the best schools "training for staff had a high profile and was carefully planned, regular and relevant. The staff were very knowledgeable about the different forms of bullying and were confident about how to tackle different forms of discrimination".<sup>108</sup>

It is the working group's opinion that education and training should also include exercises to enable staff to

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<sup>106</sup>National Parents Council Primary.Submission to DES Working Group. July 2012.

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<sup>107</sup>Flygare, E. *et al*(2011) Report 353: Evaluation of Anti-bullying Methods. Stockholm: Skolverket (Swedish National Agency for Education). p. 150

<sup>108</sup>Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) UK.Presentation to DES Working Group. September 2012

assess their own attitudes to minority groups and cultural diversity.

The Swedish study referred to earlier found that “Staff training reduces bullying of individuals bullied over short or long periods...At schools where the majority of staff received training on bullying or degrading treatment, the risk of bullying was reduced by 25 per cent compared with schools where the staff did not receive training or where only some staff received training. The pattern differs for girls and boys. Staff training reduces physical bullying of girls and of boys who have been socially bullied for short or long periods”.<sup>109</sup>

The need for bullying, and behaviour management more generally, to be addressed adequately in initial teacher education was raised in a number of submissions considered by the working group. In their submission, Mary Immaculate College highlights research done by Norman and Galvin which suggests that “pre-service training be given to teachers so that they can become confident in providing educational programmes aimed at promoting acceptance of sexual diversity (and other forms of diversity) among students”<sup>110</sup>.

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<sup>109</sup>Flygare, E. *et al*(2011) Report 353: Evaluation of Anti-bullying Methods. Stockholm: Skolverket (Swedish National Agency for Education). Page 150

<sup>110</sup> Norman, J., Galvin, M., McNamara, G. (2006). Straight Talk: Researching Gay and Lesbian

Training should be appropriate to the individual's role and should enable participants to recognise all forms of bullying; implement effective strategies for preventing bullying and, where appropriate, intervene effectively in bullying cases. Schools should ensure that temporary and substitute teachers know about and understand the school's Code of Behaviour and anti-bullying policy.

#### **7.2.8. Prevention strategies including awareness raising**

Effective practice includes prevention and awareness raising measures on all aspects of bullying and strategies to engage students in addressing problems when they see them. In particular, the need to build empathy, respect and resilience in children were highlighted in research and the submissions.

Initiatives and programmes focused on developing students' awareness and understanding of bullying, including its causes and effects, should deal explicitly with the issue of identity based bullying.

The National Parents Council Primary, pointed out in its submission, that “It is much harder for bullying behaviour to exist, in an environment where all children are empowered and there is good awareness amongst the whole school community about what

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Issues in the School Curriculum (Dublin: Centre for Evaluation in Education).

bullying is and what to do about it if it happens. Children need to be empowered to manage a personal situation or empowered to detect and act on a situation that they may witness. It is also important that children's resilience is developed so that they can manage situations that affect them".

The Ofsted study found that the best schools "systematically taught pupils strategies to manage their own relationships with others and to resolve conflicts".<sup>111</sup>

As referred to earlier, there is space within the curriculum to foster an attitude of respect for all; promote value for diversity; address prejudice and stereotyping; and to highlight that bullying behaviour is unacceptable.

Stay Safe, SPHE, CPSE and RSE in particular provide opportunities to build self esteem and resilience in order to help children and young people more effectively deal with bullying.

However, all teachers have a role to play in the promotion of a *positive self-concept* in students. This can be achieved by for example: rewarding effort as well as success, using praise in a meaningful way; giving responsibility; asking for opinions; requesting assistance; avoiding

communications that are critical, derogatory or belittling.

Teaching strategies also have an important role to play. For instance, a teaching style that makes use of co-operative learning structures can help to increase levels of acceptance of and respect for other students.

Where possible, team teaching can also open students' eyes to accepting more than one opinion and to acting more cooperatively with others. The cooperation that the students observe between team teachers serves as a model for teaching students positive teamwork skills and attitudes.

Some value is also given in studies to the incorporation of Peer Support Strategies including: Buddying; Circle of Friends; Peer Mediation and Conflict Resolution; Peer Mentoring; and Cyber-Mentors.

Other effective activities for children and young people in school include discussion about bullying, friendship weeks, anti-bullying days/weeks, school assemblies focused on anti-bullying issues, worry boxes, drama activities, written activities, co-operative games, circle time, playground pals, making videos and other media and ICT based activities.

The working group was impressed by the recent anti-bullying campaign "*Let's kick it out*" initiated by students in Drimnagh Castle Secondary School

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<sup>111</sup>Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) UK.Presentation to DES Working Group. September 2012



in Dublin. This action, supported by the school community, is evidence of the huge potential for young people to be directly involved in raising awareness among their peers and in helping to prevent bullying from occurring.

The prevention and awareness raising measures need to be appropriate to the type and form of bullying and take into account the age and gender of the children and young people involved.

Additional supports may be required for vulnerable children such as children with special educational needs. Some children with special educational needs require careful and very explicit teaching and / or visual cues.

The need for effective transition planning (e.g. where a child moves from primary to second level) was also highlighted by Mary Grogan, Senior Special Needs Organiser in the NCSE, when she met with members of the working group. Mary highlighted the role that 'expert siblings' can play in transition planning for children and young people with disabilities or special educational needs.

In addition, it is good practice for pupils with special educational needs to have one teacher identified that they know to approach if in difficulty.

Overall, it is important to emphasise the need for continuous implementation

of prevention strategies and awareness raising in schools. Once-off activities will not work. The schools prevention strategies and awareness-raising measures should be regularly reviewed to evaluate whether they are still being effective.

### **7.2.9. Established evidence-based intervention strategies**

As part of the schools overall plan, there needs to be well established intervention strategies which are used consistently across the school.

As Ken Rigby notes "...prevention is better than cure and whatever a school can do to promote positive behaviour removes the need to discourage negative behaviour. To the extent that preventative action is successful, the need for reactive action in cases of bullying will be lessened – and also made more practicable since there will be fewer cases to deal with. As many educators have observed, interventions work better when they form part of a well-designed comprehensive whole school approach".<sup>112</sup>

Ken Rigby has also highlighted the fact that the term intervention "is often loosely used. Sometimes it is assumed that if an anti-bullying policy is operating...then the school is 'intervening'".

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<sup>112</sup>Rigby Ken, *Bullying Interventions in Schools: Six basic approaches*, ACER Press 2010. Page 121

He describes intervention as “an act or series of acts designed to deal with a case of bullying behaviour and to prevent its continuation”.

He goes on to make a further distinction:

“1. What is done when bullying behaviour is witnessed and immediate action is taken on the spot to deal with the situation, and

2. What is done to address specific cases of bullying according to a method of intervention that is designed to resolve the problem”.<sup>113</sup>

Many studies refer, for example, to the need for effective classroom discipline as an essential component to a whole school approach to bullying prevention.

Restorative approaches have been recommended in many studies as a means of dealing with bullying. Such approaches are designed to help build understanding, encourage accountability and provide opportunities for healing. Models include: The No Blame or Support Group Approach; The Common Concern Method; Mediation; Restorative Conferencing; Circle Time; and Aggression Replacement Therapy (ART).

In their paper, Sercombe and Donnelly highlight the need for interventions to start with the child or young person who is being bullied “...and with what they want to happen. There are times when things might need to be taken out of their hands, where life or limb is at risk, but this should be a very last resort. The young person needs to be involved in the development of strategies, to consent to interventions wherever possible, to express their wishes. They need to be listened to and taken seriously, and to have a controlling interest in the enterprise”.<sup>114</sup>

Each school will need to decide which methods they will use. The acceptable method(s) of intervention should be specified in the schools anti-bullying policy to ensure clarity among the entire school community about how bullying cases will be dealt with. Specifying method(s) in the anti-bullying policy will help to identify training needs and form the basis for ensuring a consistent approach by school staff.

Training in the effective use of interventions is highlighted in a number of studies.

Rigby notes that “...there are some methods which cannot reasonably be combined....This is why it is so

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<sup>113</sup>Rigby Ken, *Bullying Interventions in Schools: Six basic approaches*, ACER Press 2010. Page 25.

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<sup>114</sup> Howard Sercombe and Brian Donnelly, “Bullying and agency: definition, intervention and ethics”, page 8, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 2012, 1-12, iFirst article.

important to understand both the techniques of intervention and the assumptions and rationale of particular methods".<sup>115</sup>

There are many sources of information relating to intervention strategies. A free workshop paper, prepared by Ken Rigby, which may be useful to school communities in considering which methods are acceptable to them is available at the following link:

[www.bullyingawarenessweek.org/pdf/Bullying\\_Prevention\\_Strategies\\_in\\_Schools\\_Ken\\_Rigby.pdf](http://www.bullyingawarenessweek.org/pdf/Bullying_Prevention_Strategies_in_Schools_Ken_Rigby.pdf)

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<sup>115</sup>Rigby Ken, *Bullying Interventions in Schools: Six basic approaches*, ACER Press 2010. Page 111.





### 7.3. Key findings and recommendations

- Taking into account all of the research reviewed and submissions and presentations received, the working group are not recommending a particular anti-bullying programme, however, we would like to highlight the following core principles that should underpin a schools approach to preventing and tackling bullying:
  - A positive school culture and climate
  - School-wide approach
  - Effective Leadership
  - A shared understanding of what bullying is and it's impact
  - Anti-Bullying Policies
  - Consistent recording of reported bullying behaviour
  - Education & Training
  - Prevention strategies including awareness raising
  - Established evidence-based intervention strategies
- In particular, the working group recommends that schools encourage and strengthen open dialogue between all school staff and students. Schools should ensure that they provide appropriate opportunities for students to raise their concerns in an environment that is comfortable for the student. This includes issues that happen outside school, including cyber bullying. In order to accomplish this, schools should consider how best to address topics that are masked by prejudice and silence, such as homophobic bullying.
- Schools should ensure that students, parents / adults in children's lives and school staff at all levels are aware of the school policy, what is acceptable and unacceptable in the school environment and what actions will be taken if behaviour is deemed unacceptable.

The working group would like to highlight the following, immediate actions that schools can take which will help to prevent and tackle bullying in schools:

- Model respectful behaviour to all members of the school community at all times.
- Explicitly teach students what respectful language and respectful behaviour looks like; acts like; sounds like; feels like in class and around the school.
- Display key respect messages in classrooms, in assembly areas and around the school. Involve students in the development of these messages.
- 'Catch them being good' - notice and acknowledge desired respectful behaviour by providing positive attention.
- Consistently tackle the use of discriminatory and derogatory language in the school – this includes homophobic and racist language and language that is belittling of children with a disability.
- Give constructive feedback to students when respectful behaviour and respectful language are ignored.
- Have a system of encouragement and rewards to promote desired behaviour and compliance with the school rules and routines.
- Explicitly teach students about the appropriate use of social media.
- Positively encourage students to comply with the school rules on mobile phone and internet use. Follow up and follow through with students who ignore the rules.
- Actively involve parents / Parents' Association in awareness raising campaigns around social media.
- Actively promote the right of every member of the school community to be safe and secure in school.
- Highlight and explicitly teach school rules in child friendly language in the classroom and in common areas.
- Actively watch out for signs of bullying behaviour.
- Ensure there is adequate playground/school yard/outdoor supervision.
- School staff can get children and students to help them to identify bullying 'hot spots' and 'hot times' for bullying in the school.
  - Hot spots tend to be in the playground/school yard/outdoor areas, changing rooms, corridors and other areas of unstructured supervision.
  - Hot times again tend to be times where there is less structured supervision such as when children and young people are in the playground/school yard or moving classrooms.
- Support the establishment and work of student councils.



This is not a problem schools can solve alone

**“Bullying behaviour is a complex social issue and can take place anywhere children and young people are together.”**

## 8. Role of parents and wider society

As discussed elsewhere in this report, bullying behaviour is a complex social issue and can take place anywhere children and young people are together. Bullying can occur in many different settings including in the home, in wider family and social groups and during sporting and youth club activities.

The importance of preventing and tackling bullying in the wider community, as well as in schools, has already been highlighted in Irish settings; most notably the ABC project in Donegal and the more recent Erris project in Co. Mayo. These projects have focused on the formation of partnerships between local community development organisations, sports clubs, clergy, parents, the HSE and local education centres.

It is clear that parents and other adults who interact with children and young people, in formal and informal settings, have a huge role to play in preventing bullying and also in supporting children and young people who are: being bullied, have bullied someone else or have witnessed someone being bullied.

It is clear also that activities children and young people engage in outside of school, including sport, youth clubs and the arts can all help to develop

important lifeskills, increase their confidence, self esteem and resilience as well as providing new opportunities to make friends.

### 8.1. Role of Parents

O'Moore<sup>116</sup>, in [Understanding Bullying – A Guide for Parents and Teachers](#), has identified a number of steps that should be taken by parents in relation to preventing bullying. They can be summarised as follows:

- Talk about bullying at home, and seek to ensure that your child understands that it is wrong to bully, or to be seen to support the bullying of another person. Simultaneously, discuss peer pressure with your child, because it can be one of the reasons why a child or young person gets involved in bullying.
- Prepare your child for a time when they might be the target for bullying behaviour. As part of this, explore some of the reasons why someone may bully others. An individual may, for example, engage in bullying behaviour because they feel insecure themselves. Work through some possible responses to bullying behaviour. This might include, for example, acting confident,

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<sup>116</sup>O'Moore, Mona (2010) *Understanding School Bullying – A Guide for Parents and Teachers*: Veritas, Dublin

laughing it off or pretending you didn't notice.

- Highlight that silence is the best friend of bullying and, therefore, the importance that is attached to letting someone know.
- Teach your child the skills of assertiveness by modelling it at home. A willingness to listen before judging, rather than being reactive, coupled with learning to use the word 'I' is one of the secrets of assertive communication, for example, 'I want you to stop doing that'. The assertive child will be able to: stand tall; maintain eye contact; and express themselves clearly and calmly.
- Build empathy in your child, it has a key role to play in the prevention of bullying. It has been described as '[... the glue that makes social life possible](#).'<sup>117</sup> When a child upsets or hurts another child, parents need to intervene in a way that gets the child to think about the impact of their words or action on others and how the child feels themselves now, as a result. This builds the child's sense of respect for others, as well as their moral reasoning and their emotional intelligence. A child with empathy

has regard for others and is able to demonstrate concern for them. A child with empathy cares.

- Remembering that no one is born with negative thoughts of themselves, work to raise your child's self-esteem. Recognise, praise and reward your child's effort as well as their successes. Give them responsibility; ask for their help and for their opinions. Take care that an emotional response to a situation doesn't lead to saying something to or about your child that criticises or belittles them.
- A child's resilience and their sense of self worth are closely aligned. Fostering resilience in your child will help them to deal well with negative situations. Much of that described previously supports resilience building in your child.
- Supporting your child in the development of strong friendships will also make them less vulnerable to bullying and rejection. Plan activities that will strengthen the bond between your child and their friends. Become acquainted with the parents of your child's friends. Seek to ensure that your child understands the qualities of a good friendship, for example, being honest, kind, loyal and respectful. This can be achieved by modelling these attributes in your own friendships.

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<sup>117</sup> Hoffman, M.L. (2000) *Empathy and Moral Development: Implications for Caring and Justice*: Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

- Encourage your child to participate in activities, sporting or otherwise, that have the capacity to provide opportunities for: personal achievement; confidence building; and the promotion of self-esteem and self-discipline.
- Help your child to master the skills of mediation and conflict resolution. These skills can be demonstrated to children in the management of disputes that may occur at home. Key elements of conflict management include being able to: express one's feelings; listen without interrupting; manage anger; and compromise.
- Like in the world of adults, peer support is not a given in a child's world. Encourage your child to be a defender, to help someone when they are down and unable to help themselves. This is an example of values education, teaching your child to act responsibly in the best interest of society.
- Finally, one of the most important things that any parent can do in terms of countering bullying, is to become acquainted with the signs and symptoms that can emerge in children or young people if they are being bullied or if they are bullying others. This will support identification of a bullying problem and, therefore, early intervention.

Some possible indicators that your child is being bullied include: unexplained bruises and cuts; unexplained damage to clothing; signs of anxiety and distress; changes in mood or behaviour; deterioration in academic performance; a reluctance to go to school; additional requests for money or stealing money; damage to or loss of personal belongings; negative reactions, such as getting upset, when online, coming offline or viewing text messages.

## **8.2. Parents and cyber bullying**

Setting rules and boundaries around your child's Internet usage is an important aspect of keeping them safe on-line.

For rules and boundaries to be really effective they are best developed between the parent and their child. Parents should negotiate an agreement with their child about how and when they use the Internet.

Negotiating an agreement with your child can give you a lot of information about your child's current Internet usage. It also gives you a platform to discuss the types of things your child uses the Internet for and how long they spend in on-line activities. The dialogue surrounding the agreement can often be as useful as the agreement itself.



Research indicates that parental guidance of Internet use increases the probability that adolescents will react to support victims of cyber bullying.<sup>118</sup>

### 8.3. Early childhood

Early childhood, generally understood as the age range of 0-6 years, is a critical period in the development of key capacities that are central to supporting the achievement of human potential across all domains of life including education, health, and relationship formation.

In relation to bullying, research evidence has identified that developing social and emotional skills such as self regulation, empathy and self efficacy in young children are critical and that inhibition of the development of these can have negative behavioural consequences in later childhood, adolescence and adulthood.<sup>119</sup>

Adverse experiences in early childhood, particularly those that impact on emotional well-being have long been understood to exert life long influence on patterns of behaviour.<sup>120</sup>

From as early as six months of age, children can distinguish different skin colours, hair textures and facial features. At this age they begin to understand they are a separate person and begin to see the differences and separateness of others.

As children develop from infants to toddlers, around eighteen months of age, they begin to recognize their own features and if given a choice, will often choose the doll of their own colour.<sup>121</sup> In addition to the ability to discriminate physical attributes, very young children can also absorb the values and attitudes expressed by adults in their immediate environment and express these in their interactions with their peers. Adoption of cultural values, including prejudice has been observed in pre-school children in Northern Ireland.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>118</sup>Fawzi, N. and Goodwin, B. , 2011"Witnesses of the Offense: What Influences the Behavior of Bystanders of Cyberbullying?" *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, TBA, Boston, MA*Online.

<sup>119</sup>Gini, G., Albiero, P., Benelli, B., Altoe, G., (2007) Determinants of adolescents' active defending and passive bystanding behavior in bullying. Department of Developmental and Social Psychology, University of Padua, via Venezia, 8, 35131 Padova, Italy.<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2007.05.002>

Duke, N, Pettingell, S.L., Mc Morris, B, Borowsky, I.W. (2010) Adolescent Violence Perpetration: Associations With Multiple Types of Adverse Childhood Experiences. *Pediatrics* Vol. 125 No. 4 April 1, 2010 pp. e778 -e786 (doi: 10.1542/peds.2009-0597)

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<sup>120</sup>Adverse Childhood Experiences Study, Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, US Government. Atlanta.

<sup>121</sup>Stern-LaRosa, C. & Hofheimer Bettmann, E. 2000. *Hate Hurts: How Children Learn and Unlearn Prejudice*. New York, NY: Scholastic.

<sup>122</sup>Connolly, P., Smith, A. & Kelly, B. (2002) Too Young to Notice? The Cultural and Political Awareness of 3-6 Year Olds in Northern Ireland. Belfast: Community Relations Council

This strong body of evidence reinforces the importance of ensuring that children's early childhood experiences support the development of strong social and emotional competences.

**Aistear**, the early childhood curriculum framework for early childhood education and **Síolta**, the national quality framework for early childhood education are national practice guidelines developed by DES that have drawn on national and international research regarding good practice in early childhood and have the potential to support the delivery of high quality enriching early childhood experiences for children.

The working group considers that further implementation of the Aistear and Síolta frameworks in early childhood practice will be a necessary element of any overarching national framework to address bullying.

#### **8.4. Youth work**

The working group would like to acknowledge the value added by the youth work sector which operates alongside the education sector. It provides services, programmes and activities to 43% of the population aged 10–24, representing a significant period in both development and duration. Targeted supports for disadvantaged, marginalised and at risk young people are provided

through a variety of State funded programmes and schemes.

Youth work engages young people within their communities. This work can take place in a variety of settings including community venues, schools, youth cafes/facilities, faith groups and on sporting fields. Youth workers use various approaches to engage young people such as drama and music workshops, arts and crafts, teaching culinary skills, indoor and outdoor sports pursuits, health initiatives, life skills programmes – all of which enhance young people's personal and social development.

Youth projects and clubs can be great places for children and young people to renew their confidence, increase their self esteem and build their resilience, make new friendships and become part of a new social group thus providing them with a greater sense of belonging.

Young people are provided with safe spaces to explore their identity, learn about themselves, others and society through activities that combine enjoyment, challenge, learning and achievement. Youth work and youth activities take account of many strands of diversity fostering a sense of equality, social awareness, solidarity and inclusion among young people.

A **National Quality Standards Framework** for youth work has been introduced for staff-led projects funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA). This process entails self-assessment by the project which is then validated by an external assessment process carried out by VEC Youth Officers. **Quality Standards** for volunteer-led youth groups will be launched in January 2013 and will apply to over 1,600 youth clubs and groups funded by the DCYA. Other volunteer-led youth groups and clubs are also encouraged to engage with these standards.

These standards frameworks are centred on the following core principles:

- Young person-centred: recognising the rights of young people and holding as central their active and voluntary participation.
- Committed to ensuring and promoting the safety and well-being of young people.
- Educational and developmental.
- Committed to ensuring and promoting equality, inclusiveness and respect in all dealings with young people and adults.
- Dedicated to the provision of quality youth work and committed to continuous improvement.

These principles aim to ensure that youth work service provision supports the welfare and well-being of young people across the range of issues young people encounter and at critical stages of their lives.

The Youth Work Sector and the DCYA have also demonstrated a strong commitment to tackling homophobic bullying, through the issuing of *Addressing Homophobia: Guidelines for the Youth Sector*<sup>123</sup> and through the support of BeLonG To's national network of LGBT youth groups.<sup>124</sup>

The working group acknowledges the beneficial links which currently exist between schools, after school activities and youth focused services within their local communities. The working group recognises the value of youth work and other effective non-formal learning opportunities, in providing holistic developmental and educational opportunities for young people.

The group recommends that schools should continue to strengthen collaboration and interaction with youth services and promote the active participation by young people in youth focused services within their local communities. The working group strongly encourages youth services,

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<sup>123</sup>[http://www.belongto.org/attachments/233\\_Homophobic\\_Bullying\\_Guidelines\\_for\\_the\\_Youth\\_Work\\_Sector.pdf](http://www.belongto.org/attachments/233_Homophobic_Bullying_Guidelines_for_the_Youth_Work_Sector.pdf)

<sup>124</sup>[www.belongto.org](http://www.belongto.org)

groups and organisations to develop and implement anti-bullying policies in the context of their work with young people and to avail of the range of training and supports available through the NYCI, BeLonG To Youth Services and other national youth organisations in this regard.

### **8.5. Participation in sport and physical activity**

Among the other factors that can impact positively on a child and young person's health and well-being are participation in sport and other forms of physical activity. Numerous research studies point to the fact that physical activity can reduce depression and anxiety and improve self-esteem. This obviously can have positive benefits in terms of helping children and young people to build their confidence and resilience in dealing with bullying behaviour.

A 2010 study showed that physical activity and sport participation plays a significant role in enhancing social networks, norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation and community within or among groups.<sup>125</sup>

**“Participation in regular health enhancing physical activity has also been found to reduce rule-breaking behaviour, and to improve attention**

**span and classroom behaviour. It has positive effects on academic performance, including achievement in math tests and reading, academic grades and perceptual skills. Involvement in sport and physical education can play a significant role in the enrichment of a child's social life and the development of social interaction skills.”<sup>126</sup>**

The current guidelines from the Department of Health and Children recommend that children and young people participate in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) every day.

The **Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity** study published in 2010<sup>127</sup>, found that only 19% of primary and 12% of post-primary school children included in the survey met the Department of Health physical activity recommendation of at least 60 minutes daily of moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA). The study found that girls were less likely than boys to meet the physical activity recommendations and the likelihood of meeting the physical

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<sup>125</sup>Delaney, L & Fahey T. (2005). Social and economic value of sport in Ireland. Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute.

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<sup>126</sup>Woods C. *et al* (2010) The Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study (CSPPA). Research Report No 1. Dublin: School of Health and Human Performance, Dublin City University and the Irish Sports Council. p. 7.  
<sup>127</sup> Woods, C.B., Tannehill D., Quinlan, A., Moyna, N. and Walsh, J. (2010). The Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study (CSPPA). Research Report No 1. School of Health and Human Performance, Dublin City University and The Irish Sports Council, Dublin, Ireland.

activity recommendations decreased with increasing age.

Among the other findings were that few children (1%) spend less than two hours daily sitting viewing TV, videos or playing on the computer. This two hour threshold is recommended maximum during daylight hours, once exceeded there is a higher likelihood of developing health problems long-term.

The recommendation made by the research team was to significantly *increase participation* levels of all children and youth in sport and physical activity in Ireland.

The working group would also like to highlight that in recognition that bullying is not unique to education; sports organisations have also developed initiatives to tackle bullying.

These include the “*Let’s tackle bullying*” a GAA initiative including posters, workshops and policy. *Show Racism the Red Card* conducts anti-racism education with large numbers of young people within Irish education and also with young people in youth services. In addition, *SARI– Sport against Racism* promote intercultural dialogue and celebrate cultural diversity through projects in schools.

The working group acknowledges the intention of the GAA to roll out a series of workshops for clubs entitled GAA

Tackling Bullying from March 2013. The working group recommends that GAA clubs, along with other sporting organisations, work with schools to ensure a shared understanding of bullying in our communities, along with shared approaches to tackling bullying.

## **8.6. Cyber bullying and Industry involvement**

It is clear that social media and telecommunications companies and internet service providers have an important role to play in developing measures to prevent cyber bullying and to provide reporting mechanisms for those affected by cyber bullying.

However, because of the global nature of the internet and the service providers in this space, national governance and regulatory solutions are difficult to implement.

The EU is a global player and with the support of member states has made steps to oversee a self regulatory framework based around legislation, self-regulation and financial support.

The “European Strategy for a Better Internet for Children” was adopted by the Commission on 2 May 2012. This strategy focuses on four pillars of action: stimulation of quality on-line content for children, stepping up awareness and empowerment, creation of a safe on-line environment for children and fight against child sexual abuse material on-line.

In response to a call by Neelie Kroes, Vice President of the EU Commission, chief executives from 28 internet and telecommunications companies formed the CEO Coalition to make the internet a safer place for children. The coalition has pledged to take action in 5 areas. This includes strengthening reporting tools, privacy settings, content classification schemes, parental controls and takedown of abusive material.

In Ireland, the then Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform published the first report of the working group on the Illegal and Harmful Use of the Internet in 1998. This report presented the framework for addressing the downside of the Internet that has been in use ever since.

This report was the genesis of a strategy based on an approach of self-regulation by the Internet service provider industry, the establishment of a complaints hotline to deal with complaints about illegal content on the Internet, the establishment of the Internet Advisory Board (now superseded by the Office for Internet Safety) to coordinate the self regulatory framework, and the establishment of mechanisms to develop awareness programmes for users to empower them to protect themselves, or others in their care, from illegal and harmful material on the Internet.

In 2008 a Joint Oireachtas Communications Committee called on mobile phone operators to take measures to prevent cyber bullying via mobile phones. This resulted in the development and implementation of text blocking services by operators.

The working group encourages industry to continue to work with Irish State agencies and services, NGOs, parents and young people to raise awareness of cyber bullying and how it can be dealt with.

### **8.7. Role of the media**

The media has an important role to play in educating the public about social issues including respect for diversity, inclusion, avoiding stereotyping, bullying, mental health, self-harm and suicide. The role of the media is outside the terms of the working groups remit, however, we would like to emphasise the need for responsible reporting of often very tragic and distressing incidents of bullying and suicide in particular. This has been highlighted by the recent tragic suicides of young people in this country.

The working group acknowledges the Code of Practice for Newspapers and Magazines and in particular Principle 9 of the Code<sup>128</sup>:

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<sup>128</sup>Press Council of Ireland and Office of the Press Ombudsman (2009) Code of Practice for Newspapers and Magazines. Dublin: Press Council of Ireland. [www.pressombudsman.ie/code-of-practice.150.html](http://www.pressombudsman.ie/code-of-practice.150.html)



## “Principle 9 - Children

9.1 Newspapers and magazines shall take particular care in seeking and presenting information or comment about a child under the age of 16.

9.2 Journalists and editors should have regard for the vulnerability of children and in all dealings with children, should bear in mind the age of the child, whether parental or other adult consent has been obtained for such dealings, the sensitivity of the subject-matter, and what circumstances if any make the story one of public interest. Young people should be free to complete their time at school without unnecessary intrusion. The fame, notoriety or position of a parent or guardian must not be used as sole justification for publishing details of a child's private life.”

The working group is also aware of guidelines which have been issued by Samaritans in relation to media reporting of suicides. We believe that similar standards should be adopted by the media in relation to reporting of bullying.

While recognising that the role of the media lies outside the terms of reference of this group, we would recommend that the Code Committee of the Press Council of Ireland consider whether expanding Principle 9 of their code would be appropriate in order to further support responsible reporting in this area.

## **8.8. Proposal for a National Anti-Bullying Framework**

In reviewing the broader national context in which schools operate, the working group were struck by the absence of an overarching, national framework for all anti-bullying work.

A useful example of such an approach is the document “A National Approach to Anti-Bullying for Scotland's Children and Young People” developed by the Scottish Government and the Scottish Anti-Bullying Steering Group.

The working group recommends that consideration be given to developing a national framework to communicate and promote a common vision and policy aims regarding bullying including respect for diversity and inclusiveness.

Such a framework could be beneficial in informing work across all agencies and communities to ensure a coherent, consistent and holistic approach to preventing and tackling bullying in Ireland.

The working group recommends that this matter be considered in the development of the development of the new Children and Young People's Policy Framework which is intended to be the overarching national framework for the development of policies and services to improve outcomes for children and young people and promote all aspects of their development.

## 8.9. Key findings and recommendations

- Bullying behaviour is a complex social issue and can take place anywhere children and young people are together. Bullying can occur in many different settings including in the home, in wider family and social groups and during sporting and youth club activities.
- It is clear that parents and other adults who interact with children and young people, in formal and informal settings, have a huge role to play in preventing bullying and also in supporting children and young people who are: being bullied, have bullied someone else or have witnessed someone being bullied.

Adults, and parents in particular, need to:

- Be good role models for children and young people;
- Teach young people to respect and value difference and diversity;
- Make it their business to know what bullying is and understand the different types and forms of bullying;
- Educate themselves in relation to social media and take an active interest in how children and young people are using the internet, social media and mobile phones;
- Know, and lookout for, the signs that a child or young person may be being bullied;
- Offer support and listen to what a child or young person wants you to do to help;
- Make it clear that bullying is not acceptable behaviour.



- The working group recommends that consideration be given in the context of the Children and Young People's Policy Framework to developing a new national framework which would set out the Government's commitment to preventing and tackling bullying for children and young people from early childhood through to adulthood.
- The working group considers that further implementation of the Aistear and Síolta frameworks in early childhood practice will be a necessary element of any overarching national framework to address bullying.
- The working group acknowledges the beneficial links which currently exist between schools, after school activities and youth focused services within their local communities. The working group recognises the value of youth work and other effective non-formal learning opportunities, in providing holistic developmental and educational opportunities for young people. The group recommends that schools should continue to strengthen collaboration and interaction with youth services and promote the active participation by pupils in youth focused services within their local communities.
- The group strongly encourages youth services, groups and organisations to develop and implement anti-bullying policies in the context of their work with young people and to avail of the range of training and supports available through the NYCI, BeLong To Youth Services and other national youth organisations in this regard.
- The working group acknowledges the intention of the GAA to roll out a series of workshops for clubs entitled GAA Tackling Bullying from March 2013. The working group recommends that GAA clubs, along with other sporting organisations, work with schools to ensure a shared understanding of bullying in our communities, along with shared approaches to tackling bullying.
- It is clear that social media and telecommunications companies and internet service providers have an important role to play in developing measures to prevent cyber bullying and to provide reporting mechanisms for those affected by cyber bullying. The working group encourages industry to continue to work with Irish State agencies and services, NGOs, parents and young people to raise awareness of cyber bullying and how it can be dealt with.
- While recognising that the role of the media lies outside the terms of reference of this group, we would recommend that the Code Committee of the Press Council of Ireland reconsider whether expanding Principle 9 of their code would be appropriate in order to further support responsible reporting in this area.



## **Action Plan on Bullying**

Including recommendations for  
further consideration

Action	Timescale	Responsibility / Lead
<p><b>1. New National Anti-Bullying Procedures for Schools</b></p> <p>The DES, in consultation with the relevant education partners, will revise the existing anti-bullying guidelines for schools and the 2006 policy template for schools. The new document will clearly indicate the requirement on schools to have an anti-bullying policy which forms part of the school's Code of Behaviour.</p> <p>This work will take into account the working groups recommendations that :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schools promote a school culture and climate that is welcoming of diversity and where all relationships are respectful and where members of the school community feel empowered to prevent, discuss, disclose and deal with bullying behaviour.</li> <li>Schools must work to prevent and effectively tackle homophobic and transphobic bullying in particular, which will lead to significant improvement in the school climate for all students.</li> <li>All grounds of harassment under the Equal Status Acts should be listed in anti-bullying policies (gender (including transgender), civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller community).</li> <li>That the definition of bullying in the new national procedures should include a specific reference to the following forms and methods of bullying: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>deliberate exclusion, malicious gossip and other forms of relational bullying,</i></li> <li><i>cyber bullying, and</i></li> <li><i>identity based bullying (specifically including homophobic bullying, racist bullying, membership of the Traveller community and bullying of those with disabilities or special educational needs).</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>This work will seek to strengthen oversight arrangements in schools including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Periodic summary reports of bullying incidents to be provided to the Board of Management;</li> <li>That the Board of Management must review the policy and its implementation annually and provide confirmation to the school community, including parents / the Parents' Association, that it has done so;</li> </ul>	<p>New procedures in place for 2013/14 school year</p>	<p>Department of Education and Skills</p> <p>Implementation of new procedures to follow in all primary and second level schools.</p>

- That the policy and record of its review are available to the Department and patron if requested.

In addition, the new policy template should:

- Make provision for schools to document prevention and education strategies;
- Include a standardised template for reviewing implementation of a school's anti-bullying policy for completion each year by the Board of Management;
- Provide a bullying report template for recording bullying incidents.
- Support schools to analyse data to identify trends/patterns in the types of bullying in their school and to provide a baseline of evidence for adjusting policies and practices on an ongoing basis.

## **2. Review of Teacher Education Support Service provision**

The Department's teacher education support services will be directed to give priority to :

- the gathering of evidence in relation to teacher needs with regard to bullying and teacher confidence / capacity to address, in particular, identity based bullying, including homophobic bullying, and cyber bullying.
- the provision of an appropriate Continuous Professional Development (CPD) response.

In carrying out a review of teacher education needs, and in providing CPD, the Teacher Education Support Services will take account of the following issues:

- The need for support services to co-ordinate their support to schools so that a common approach is adopted by all support services around the area of bullying behaviour, based on the new DES Anti-Bullying procedures.
- CPD for school leaders on the prevention of bullying behaviour in schools should include best practice guidelines on the promotion of a culture of mutual respect in schools.
- CPD for teachers should not only involve awareness raising around all forms of bullying behaviour but should also include the provision of sample lesson plans that address school wide expectations such as rules and routines, respectful behaviour and respectful language. Sample lesson plans need to be age appropriate and differentiated for different levels of ability.
- CPD should support the development of Anti- Bullying policies in schools and the implementation of the policy on a daily basis in schools, based on evidence- based practice nationally and

Review to be completed in the first half of 2013.

Teacher Education Section, Department of Education and Skills.

<p>internationally.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevant Support Services should assist schools developing data gathering practices, templates and analysing data, taking into account data protection requirements and Child Protection procedures.</li> <li>• Relevant Support Services should also assist schools in incorporating their Anti-Bullying policy into the school's Code of Behaviour.</li> <li>• Education Centres could develop courses on implementation strategies and methodologies to promote respectful behaviour and address bullying behaviour in schools.</li> </ul>		
<p><b>3. Coordinated training and resource development for boards of management and parents</b></p> <p>A coordinated plan for training and awareness initiatives for parents and boards of management to be provided in conjunction with management bodies and parents councils. This can build on existing work including the current joint DES / GLEN initiative to develop guidelines for boards of management on supporting LGBT young people.</p>	<p>Plan to be agreed by end Q2 2013 with roll out to commence thereafter.</p>	<p>Department of Education and Skills, Management Bodies and Parents Councils</p>
<p><b>4. School Inspection</b></p> <p>Existing models for evaluating SPHE and for whole school evaluations (WSEs) should be adapted by amending questionnaires and by other means to include more evidence gathering concerning the effectiveness of the school's actions to create a positive school culture and to prevent and tackle bullying.</p>	<p>2013-14 school year</p>	<p>Inspectorate of Department of Education and Skills</p>
<p><b>5. Thematic Evaluation of Bullying in Schools</b></p> <p>A thematic evaluation should be conducted, in collaboration with relevant partners, in a sample of primary and post-primary schools to evaluate the effectiveness of the actions schools take to create a positive school culture and to prevent and tackle various forms of bullying, including homophobic bullying.</p>	<p>The evaluation framework and instruments will be developed in 2013 to enable school-based work to be conducted in 2014</p>	<p>Inspectorate of Department of Education and Skills</p>
<p><b>6. School Self Evaluation</b></p> <p>Schools should be supported in self-evaluating their effectiveness in creating a positive school culture and in preventing and tackling bullying. This should be done through the provision of criteria to judge quality within the <i>Leadership and Management</i> and the <i>Support for Students</i> dimensions of School Self-Evaluation (SSE).</p>	<p>Work on the development of the criteria for the Leadership and Management dimension of SSE will begin within the Department in 2013.</p> <p>Work on the Support for</p>	<p>Inspectorate of Department of Education and Skills</p>

	Students dimension will begin in 2014.	
<p><b>7. New national anti-bullying website</b></p> <p>A single national anti-bullying website should be developed to provide information for parents, young people and school staff on types and methods of bullying and how to deal with bullying behaviour. This website can also provide links to the range of curriculum and other resources available. Good examples of national websites in other jurisdictions include the <a href="http://www.respectme.org.uk">www.respectme.org.uk</a> website managed by RespectMe the Scottish anti-bullying service and the <a href="http://www.Stopbullying.gov">www.Stopbullying.gov</a> federal government website managed by the U.S. Department of Health &amp; Human Services.</p>	Site to go-live in 2013	Department of Education and Skills and Department of Children and Youth Affairs
<p><b>8. Stand Up Awareness Week Against Homophobic Bullying</b></p> <p>In light of the identified need to combat bullying against LGBT young people or young people perceived to be LGBT, DES should support the Stand Up Awareness campaign. The objective of this initiative is to prevent and tackle homophobic and transphobic bullying in schools by : a) increasing friendship and support of LGBT students by other students; b) increasing awareness of LGBT students among other students, teachers, principals, and others in the school-wide community; increasing respect for diversity and LGBT identities; increasing the likelihood that LGBT students will report bullying; and, thereby, reduce bullying and attendant isolation, self-harm, suicidality, and mental health difficulties among LGBT students.</p>	Agreement to be finalised Q1 2013.	Department of Education and Skills and Belong To
<p><b>9. Support a media campaign focused on cyber bullying and specifically targeted at young people</b></p> <p>As part of the Safer Internet Day 2013, which takes place on 5<sup>th</sup> February, support the rollout of a social marketing campaign specifically targeted at young people.</p>	Rollout from 5 <sup>th</sup> February 2013.	DES and the Safer Internet Ireland Awareness Centre - PDST
<p><b>10. Research on effective supports for children with special educational needs</b></p> <p>The working group welcomes the agreement of the National Disability Authority to conduct research on good practice and effective interventions in Irish schools for the prevention of bullying of children with special educational needs. This will support the dissemination of good practice across the school system.</p>	2013	National Disability Authority and DES
<p><b>11. Research on prevalence and impact of bullying linked to social media on the mental health and suicidal behaviour among young people</b></p> <p>The working group welcomes the agreement of the National Office for Suicide Prevention to facilitate a literature review to examine the prevalence and impact of bullying linked to social media on the mental health and suicidal behaviour among young people within the school setting. In addition, the review may identify at risk groups</p>	2013	National Office for Suicide Prevention and DES

who may be particularly vulnerable to this form of bullying to enable the development of appropriate preventative measures for the whole school community.		
<b>12. Awareness raising measures, including guidelines, for policy makers and DES agencies and services which work in the schools sector on all types and forms of bullying.</b> DES to facilitate a series of internal seminars to build capacity in respect of bullying. All policy staff of relevant DES business units and DES agencies and services will be invited to participate. Guidelines will be developed for staff to support policy proofing for identity based issues, in particular LGBT identity and homophobic bullying.	2013	DES



## Recommendations for further consideration

<b>Establishment of an Anti-Bullying Implementation Group</b>	A group to be established to oversee the implementation of accepted actions and recommendations set out in this Action Plan. The Implementation Group would also have a role in relation to the research proposed in actions 9 & 10 above.	DES
<b>Protocols between state agencies providing services to schools.</b>	Agencies should review their protocols for the appropriate sharing of information about schools and the children and young people in those schools. This could help to identify issues that need to be addressed at school level and help ensure resources are used to support children and young people to best effect.	Agencies and services under the aegis of the DES, DCYA and HSE.
<b>Initial Teacher Education</b>	The Teaching Council's Initial Teacher Education: Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers set out the mandatory elements to be contained in programmes of ITE and the learning outcomes. The Learning Outcomes in the Guidelines do not currently include specific references to bullying. The Working Group recommends that consideration be given to making specific references to bullying in the guidelines in line with the findings in this Action Plan.	DES and Teaching Council
<b>Curriculum</b>	<p>The DES, NCCA and other bodies involved in curriculum development and implementation should consider the findings and recommendations particularly in the context of the development of new curricula.</p> <p>Consideration should be given to placing a requirement on schools to provide SPHE at senior cycle.</p>	DES, NCCA and teacher education support services.
<b>Stereotyping</b>	DES to engage with book publishers who produce materials for schools in relation to stereotyping.	DES
<b>Development of a new National Framework for Anti-Bullying</b>	The working group recommends that consideration be given in the context of the Children and Young People's Policy Framework to developing a new national framework which would set out the Government's commitment to preventing and tackling bullying for children and young people	DCYA leading the development of the Children and Young People's Policy Framework

	from early childhood through to adulthood.	
<b>Research into investigative procedures in other jurisdictions and development of proposals for change to the Irish system if real value can be added.</b>	The Working Group would welcome a further in-depth analysis of specific investigative processes in other jurisdictions which could usefully inform the development of any proposed improvements to the Irish system for investigating complaints.	To be agreed
<b>Research, monitoring and evaluation</b>	As resources permit, identify and initiate further research on bullying issues including monitoring and evaluation of initiatives in schools and other sectors in order to support the dissemination of good practice and provide evidence for further policy development and decision making.	DES and DCYA
<b>Children First</b>	<p>Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children states that "In situations where the incident is serious and where the behaviour is regarded as potentially abusive, the school should consult the HSE Children and Family Services with a view to drawing up an appropriate response, such as a management plan. " It also states that "Serious instances of bullying behaviour should be referred to the HSE Children and Family Services"</p> <p>It is recommended that more detailed guidance should be provided by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs for schools and others as to what constitutes "serious bullying" under Children First and when referrals to the HSE should be made.</p>	DCYA
<b>Code of Conduct for the media</b>	Within the context of the findings and recommendations in this action plan, consideration could be given to reviewing Principle 9 in the Code of Practice for Newspapers and Magazines which relates to Children and specifically consider adding a reference to the handling of media stories relating to bullying and suicide.	Press Ombudsman of Ireland
<b>Youth Work</b>	<p>The group recommends that schools should continue to strengthen collaboration and interaction with youth services and promote the active participation by pupils in youth focused services within their local communities.</p> <p>The group strongly encourages youth services, groups and organisations to develop and implement anti-bullying policies in the context of</p>	DCYA, Youth Sector and schools

	their work with young people and to avail of the range of training and supports available through the NYCI, BeLonG To Youth Services and other national youth organisations in this regard.	
<b>Sporting organisations</b>	The working group acknowledges the intention of the GAA to roll out a series of workshops for clubs entitled GAA Tackling Bullying from March 2013. The working group recommends that GAA clubs, along with other sporting organisations, work with schools to ensure a shared understanding of bullying in our communities, along with shared approaches to tackling bullying.	Sporting Organisations
<b>Partnership with Industry</b>	It is clear that social media and telecommunications companies and internet service providers have an important role to play in developing measures to prevent cyber bullying and to provide reporting mechanisms for those affected by cyber bullying. The working group encourages industry to continue to work with Irish State agencies and services, NGOs, parents and young people to raise awareness of cyber bullying and how it can be dealt with.	Industry



# Appendices

## ***Appendix 1      Membership of the working group***

Siobhan Aherne, Inspectorate, Department of Education and Skills (DES).

Michael Barron, BeLoNG To Youth Services

Mark Caffrey, Irish Second level Students Union

Breeda Connaughton, Central Policy Unit, (CPU), DES.

Barbara Duffy, Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA).

James Gibbs, DCYA.

Simon Grehan, Safer Internet Ireland Awareness Centre, Professional Development Service for Teachers.

Sandra Irwin-Gowran, Gay + Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN)

Fidelma Lyons, CPU, DES.

Deirdre McDonnell, CPU, DES, Chair.

Judith McGuinness, School Governance, DES.

Teresa McNeill, School Governance, DES.

Carol-Anne O'Brien, Belong To Youth Services

Brian Sheehan, GLEN.

Neil Ward, Office of the Minister for Education and Skills.

## **Appendix 2      Submissions received by the Working Group**

### **A-C**

All Resources Company Ltd  
Anti-bullying Campaign- Tools for Teachers  
Association of Community & Comprehensive Schools  
Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland  
Barnardos  
Byrne, Dr. Brendan  
Catholic Primary Schools Management Association  
Child Abuse Prevention Programme  
Childhood Development Initiative  
Children's Mental Health Coalition  
Curry, Dr. & Gilligan, Professor, School of Social Work, TCD

### **D-F**

Disability Education Network  
Dublin City Comhairle na nÓg  
Dunphy, Shane  
Donegal Education Centre  
Educate Together  
Educational Disadvantage Centre, St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra  
Farrelly, Gerard  
Fianna Fáil  
Froebel College

### **G-I**

Gardiner, Eileen  
Health Promotion Department - HSE West  
Immigrant Council of Ireland  
Institute of Guidance Counsellors  
Irish National Teachers' Organisation  
Irish Traveller Movement  
ISPCC

### **J-L**

Joint Managerial Body  
Keane, Mary Anne  
Kent, Mary  
Kerry Education Service  
Lewis, Simon

### **M-O**

McDonnell, John  
MD Inspired Solutions  
Minton, Dr. Stephen, Lecturer in Psychology of Education, TCD  
Morohan, Justin  
Murray, Genevieve T., School of Education, Trinity College Dublin  
National Anti-bullying Coalition  
National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education  
National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals  
National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)

National Parents Council Primary  
National Youth Council of Ireland  
Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration  
O'Donovan, Mary  
O'Higgins Norman, Dr. James Lecturer, School of Education Studies, DCU  
O' Keefe, Dr. Margaret, Institute of Technology, Cork  
O' Moore, Professor Mona, Trinity College Dublin  
O' Sullivan, Dr. Carol, Lecturer in SPHE, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick.

## **P-R**

Rooney, Pdraig  
Ryan, Evelyn  
Parent Place, Director

## **S-U**

Show Racism the Red Card  
Smiddy Kerins, Mai  
Smith, Murray, Senior Researcher, Anti-bullying Centre, TCD  
Snare, Pat and Tony  
SPHE Network  
SPHE Support Service (post primary)  
Sport against Racism Ireland  
St. Patrick's College of Education  
Sticks and Stones  
The Integration Centre  
Translators Education Network

## **V-Z**

VideoWeb Training, Praxis  
WEBWISE  
White Flag School Project  
Williams, Edel  
Whelan, Alan



**Appendix 3*****Presentations made to the Working Group***

<b>Date</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Representative</b>
17 July 2012	Equality Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o Laurence Bond, Head of Research</li><li>o Cathal Kelly, Development Officer</li></ul>
17 July 2012	Ombudsman for Children's Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o Emily Logan, Ombudsman for Children</li><li>o Karen McAuley, Education and Participation Officer</li></ul>
11 September 2012	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o Sue Morris King, National Adviser for Behaviour and Attendance</li></ul>
11 September 2012	Respect Me (Scotland's Anti-bullying Service)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o Brian Donnelly, Director</li></ul>
11 September 2012	SPHE Support Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o Pat Courtney, SPHE Anti-Bullying Coordinator</li></ul>
12 September 2012	Irish Traveller Movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o Paula Madden, Yellow Flag Co-ordinator</li></ul>
12 September 2012	Office for Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o Killian Forde, CEO and Peter Szlovak</li></ul>
12 September 2012	Immigrant Council of Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o Fidèle Mutwarasibo, Integration Manager</li></ul>
2 October 2012	Webwise (part of the Professional Development Service for Teachers – technology in education)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o Simon Grehan, Internet Safety Project Officer</li></ul>
2 October 2012	Policy Development and Performance Management Unit, Department of Children and Youth Affairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o Michele Clarke, Principal Officer / Social Work Specialist</li></ul>
3 October 2012	Institute of Guidance Counsellors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o Gerry Flynn, President</li><li>o Mary Costy,</li></ul>
3 October 2012	National Anti-bullying Coalition and Anti Bullying Campaign	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o Monica Monahan</li><li>o Teresa McSweeney</li><li>o Seán Fallon</li></ul>

<b>Date</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Representative</b>
3 October 2012	National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS)	o Mary Keane, National Co-ordinator
25 October 2012	DES Inspectorate and National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)	o Treasa Kirk, Inspector o Margaret Grogan, NEPS
25 October 2012		o Dr. Stephen Minton, Lecturer in Psychology of Education, TCD
25 October 2012		o Dr. James O' Higgins Norman, Lecturer, School of Education, DCU
26 October 2012	National Education Welfare Board	o Mary Kenny, Regional Coordinator, School Completion Programme o Jean Rafter, Regional Manager Education Welfare Service
26 October 2012	Anti-bullying Centre, Trinity College Dublin	o Professor Mona O'Moore, Anti bullying Centre TCD
26 October 2012	Professional Development Service for Teachers	o Margaret Nohilly, PDST
26 October 2012	Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children	o Lisa Collins, Information Officer
16 November 2012	National Disability Authority*	o Donie O'Shea, Senior Policy and Public Affairs Advisor o Dharragh Hunt, Policy and Public Affairs Advisor
21 November 2012	Facebook	o Patricia Cartes, Private and Public Policy
21 November 2012	Garda Síochána	o Colette Quinn, Superintendent, Garda Office for Children & Youth Affairs
21 November 2012	National Office for Suicide Prevention	o Susan Kenny, Training and Development Officer
22 November 2012	National Council for Special Education (NCSE)*	o Mary Grogan, Senior Special Educational Needs Organiser
22 November 2012	Parents*	o Niamh O'Doherty o Barbara MacMahon

\*representatives (DES Central Policy Unit, Minister's office) from the Working Group met these organizations and individuals.

#### **Appendix 4:     *Existing supports for schools in their efforts to prevent and manage bullying***

A range of services can provide support to schools in their efforts to prevent and manage bullying. While access to services may vary from region to region, the services and supports identified are currently available to most schools. It is necessary, therefore, for schools to identify the range of services available locally, and to build networks and relevant contacts.

##### **Services under the aegis of the Department of Education and Skills:**

##### **The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) - [www.pdst.ie](http://www.pdst.ie)**

The PDST provides continuing professional development for teachers to improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools. Support is provided across a range of areas, both at primary and post-primary levels. Agreed priorities inform annual programmes of work. PDST now incorporates support for the Stay Safe Programme and Webwise – [www.webwise.ie](http://www.webwise.ie).

##### **The Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) Support Service - [www.sphe.ie](http://www.sphe.ie)**

The SPHE Support Service provides support for post-primary schools with all aspects of the implementation of SPHE and RSE in a whole school context. This includes provision for: whole-staff seminars on, for example, bullying prevention and intervention; in-school meetings on, for example policy review and development; school-based anti-bullying support to include, for example, administration of a student survey and provision of a parent evening. In addition the SPHE Support Service offers Continuing Professional Development for Teachers of SPHE, on a wide range of topics including, for example: sexual orientation and homophobia; mental health; and strategies for resolving bullying issues.

##### **National Education Centres – [www.ateci.ie](http://www.ateci.ie)**

Education centres support the in-service needs of local teachers, support locally identified needs and provide a range of activities for the educational community at primary and post-primary level. There are 21 full time and 9 part time centres nationwide, supported principally by the Department of Education and Skills.

**The National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT) – [www.teacherinduction.ie](http://www.teacherinduction.ie)**

The NIPT aims to support the induction of newly qualified teachers (NQTs) into the teaching profession in primary and post-primary schools over the course of their first year. Professional development for NQTs is provided in areas such as, for example, Child Protection and Behaviour Management.

**Special Education Support Service (SESS) - [www.sess.ie](http://www.sess.ie)**

The SESS coordinates, develops and delivers a flexible range of professional development initiatives for primary and post-primary school personnel working with young people with special educational needs.

**National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) - [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)**

The NEPs is identified as a potential support to both primary and post-primary schools in the management of bullying in light of the support that the service can provide in relation to: dealing with social, emotional and learning needs; managing critical incidents; and liaising with social services, CAMHS, relevant HSE and voluntary services, other professionals, and services and agencies of the Department of Education and Skills,

**The National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE) - [www.ncge.ie](http://www.ncge.ie)**

The NCGE plays a key role in supporting, developing and disseminating good practice in guidance for all areas of education at post-primary level. In recent times, for example, the NCGE, in conjunction with the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN), provided schools with a publication entitled 'Supporting LGBT Students: The Role of the Guidance Counsellor'.

**National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS) - [www.nbss.ie](http://www.nbss.ie)**

The NBSS provides a whole-school consultative service to self-selected post-primary schools. Continuing professional development is provided for staff on: the

development of structures; targeted intervention behaviour support; and intensive individualised and/or small group support for students.

**The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) - [www.ncse.ie](http://www.ncse.ie)**

The NCSE has statutory responsibility for the provision of a service to young people with special educational needs through a network of special educational needs organisers (SENOs). SENOs provide advice and support to primary and post-primary schools.

**Existing guidelines**

The DES, often in collaboration with other bodies, provides a range of guidelines to advise and guide schools in relation to countering bullying. This includes, for example: Planning the School Guidance Programme; Guidelines for Second-level Schools on Embedding Equality in School Development Planning; and Schools and the Equal Status Act. These are available to download on the Department's website [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)

**Other relevant supports and programmes:**

- National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) [www.newb.ie](http://www.newb.ie)
- Children's Services' Committees
- Child and Family Support Agency
- Health Promotion Officers
- HSE Resource Officers for Suicide Prevention
- HSE Schools' Liaison Person
- Garda Primary and Post primary School programmes

